

A
STUDY
OF
DWELLING

Julia McArthur
Thesis Statement
August 29, 2022

When I think of where I want my studies to take me, through school and then on into my life, I think of how I want to understand emotionally and cognitively how the experience of space has impacted our understanding of ourselves. The space that I believe serves as a foundation for the way we experience the world we live in is the home, where we learned of the world first. I will focus my thesis on the design of the spaces we dwell in: the home.



Above: Ricardo Bofill "La Fábrica"

Philosophers like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Gaston Bachelard and Architect Louis Kahn, have referenced the spaces we dwell in, and what it means to dwell in the most ideal manner. In my mind this is what it means to “dwell well”. As a lifelong practice, I endeavor to learn and continue to internalize the psychology of space at home, how it influences our behavior, and how it can provide a safe place and opportunity for us to better know ourselves.

It feels as though people often conflate the idea of living well/dwelling well with “luxury.” I do not believe dwelling well correlates to our financial capabilities—I have seen many homes of very wealthy people that seem to present a violent absence of soul, of livability, or of a reflection of the person that lives there. And when one can recognize this it suddenly feels as though you are watching a movie with a poorly written script, and it is obvious that the actor is reading their lines. It is deeply impersonal. The concept of dwelling, one could argue, is entirely separate from the foundational structure of a home, as it does relate to a state of mind. But then I confuse myself, because I want to argue it is the very structure of the home, the passages I inherited as a child, that allowed me to take moments to myself, that allowed me to experience moments of wonder, awe and healing, and that allowed me to dream and develop a closer relationship to myself. Light, temperature, scent, color, texture, materiality, and so on, all played a role in the space I was in, regardless of the actual programming of that space.

So perhaps it is more pointed to say that there is an undeniable duet between the physical space and the way one inhabits it, though they are not the same thing. I believe that the job of a designer involves offering some level of emotionally intuitive guidance, and to become a research psychologist of sorts—aiming to understand precisely what brings

Rose Tarlow's Home in Los Angeles



Peter Zumthor House



forth opportunities for knowing more in one's own life, and how space can inform this. I believe the fusion of Architecture, Interior Architecture, Interior Design, and Psychology are all in concert with one another in the space of a home. You can pick distinct designers that are aware of how to live well and are astoundingly able to facilitate this understanding not just in their own space, but in another's as well. What separates these designers from others is that they exhibit a radical mindfulness and integral understanding of their own experience of space as well as others when they design. Some designers may not even refer to it as "design", because even that word could suggest a level of impersonal interaction that does not quite fit what is occurring.

It, to me, is the experience of safety in one form or another that allows our nervous system to regulate enough to experience the world around us. But I will go further and assert that it is comfort that will allow us to experience true presence. Violation in the home is the fastest way to creating an unsafe environment where we are required to live in fight or flight as opposed to present awareness. We are robbed of the ability to even breathe at a healthy pace, and the notion of comfort seems superfluous and unattainable, rather than a necessity in the healthy experiences we as humans crave. It is a robbery of epic proportion. Even in a scary home, the space to have an opportunity for comfort can save you, and a space without it could ruin you. Such a pivotal moment that it seems the human psyche can hinge on for survival is a space that I want to understand and expand upon. I want to understand what that space can be, how it saved us and how to understand it enough to help others who may not have it, experience it through the design of these spaces.

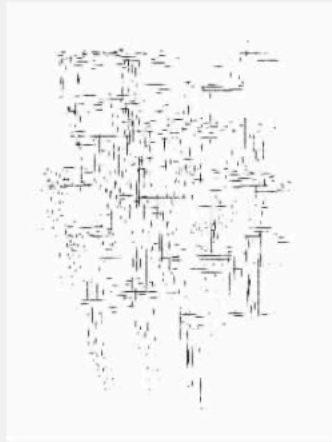
Below I have listed those that have deeply inspired me in both philosophy and practice in addition to my own life experience:

Ricardo Bofill - Architect, *La Fábrica*
Rose Tarlow - Antiquarian/Designer/Author
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin - Philosopher
Gaston Bachelard - Philosopher/Author of *The Poetics of Space*

Peter Zumthor - Architect/Author of *Thinking Architecture*
Louis Kahn - Architect
Louis Barragán - *Casa Louis Barragán*

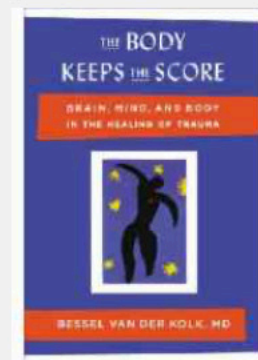
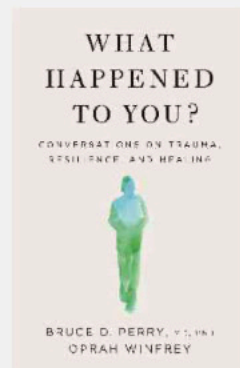
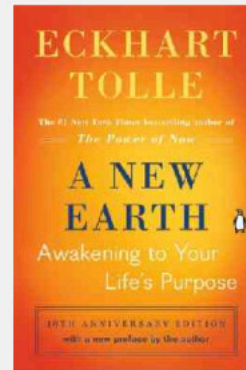
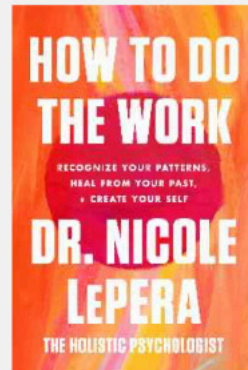
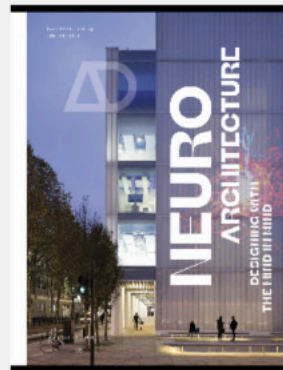
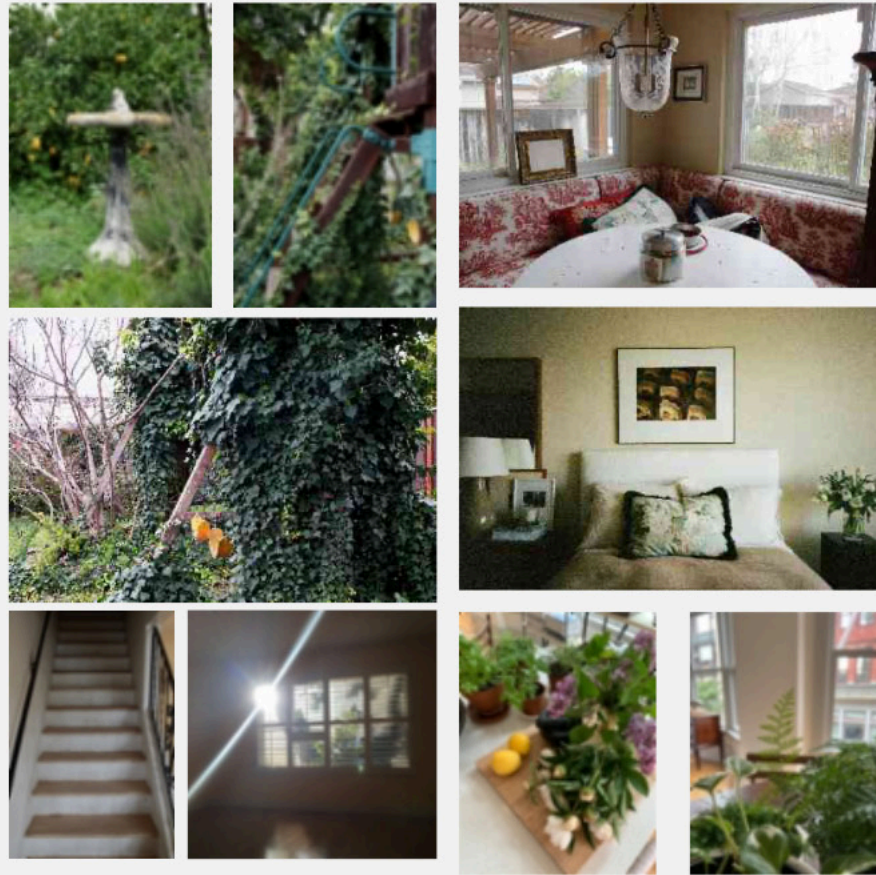
nature & beauty

DRAWINGS



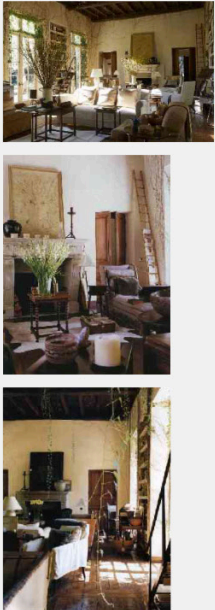
mindspace

HOME



nature & built
environment

ROSE TARLOW



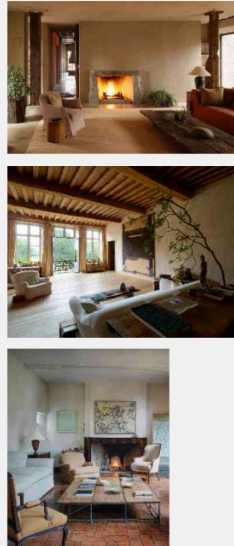
RICARDO BOFILL



LUIS BARRAGAN



AXEL VERVOORDT



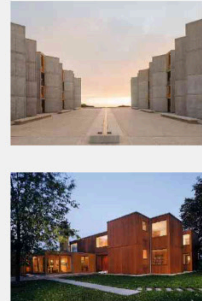
XAVIER CORBERO



PETER ZUMTHOR



LOUIS KAHN



JORN UTZON



Annotated Bibliography

Ritchie, Ian. *Neuroarchitecture: Designing with the Mind in Mind*. First Edition. West Sussex, UK: Wiley, 2020.

Along with contributing editors from varying backgrounds including architectural historians, scientists, psychologists, and architects, Ian Ritchie explores the relationship between neuroscience, neural plasticity, stimuli to which the brain responds, and how architectural elements—space—can contribute to changes within the very structure of the brain. Our brain controls our behavior, genes control the anatomy of the brain itself, environmental factors can effect gene function, and therefore effect the structure of our brains, and as a result, our behavior. We can understand these parts of our brain that are effected by space as multi-sensory aware. In understanding the crossover that disciplines such as neurology and architecture contain and then furthering these practices by intertwining them, we can become better, more attuned designers. This distinctly relates to my thesis as understanding the biological effects of memory and stimuli translate to our experience of space.

Van der Kolk, Bessel. A. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York, NY: Viking, 2014.

Van der Kolk writes this book in an effort to help define trauma and delve into the processes that make trauma so severely engrained in the brain. Through explorations of his own research and experiences as a psychiatrist, he wrote this book detailing the distinct psychological effects, as well as physical effects traumatic stress can have on

human beings. This book is considered paradigm shifting in the world of mental health, as it distinctly explains the recurrent nature of trauma and its resulting fallout in human behavior and wellness. Van der Kolk also provides a framework for understanding what the healing process could look like using examples from his own work and studies he has personally performed. This relates to my thesis as understanding the way humans can heal from trauma relates to a level of sensory input, which Van der Kolk details as integral in the healing process.

Zumthor, Peter. *Thinking Architecture*. Second Expanded Edition. Boston, MA: Birkhauser, 2010.

Peter Zumthor, a Swiss architect, writes *Thinking Architecture* to give the reader a window into the way he conceives of space and his practice. He greatly appeals to the notions of memory and emotion in his work and offers insight into why these greatly move him. By detailing some of his most personal projects, and telling stories of his past that greatly influenced his projects, Zumthor draws a distinct line between the way he conceives of the built environment in relation to his memory. This can be a profound help to my thesis as it serves as an example of the built environment in its most personal form, and Zumthor's writings can help give insight to that process.

Shapira, Elana. "Dressing a Celebrity: Adolf Loos's House for Josephine Baker." *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 11, no. 2 (2004): 2–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40663079>.

Shapira discusses the impetus for and process of Loos's design of the Baker House. In this essay she delves into the main drivers behind Loos's decision making throughout the design process and how it relates to the performative nature of the architecture, echoing Josephine Baker's career as a performer. Shapira mentions Loos's interest in "authentic" architecture which is an interesting point of intervention for my thesis as it relates to this idea of a prescription in design.

Moos, Stanislaus von, and Margaret Sobiesky. "Le Corbusier and Loos." *Assemblage*, no. 4 (1987): 25–37. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171033>.

In this essay, Moos discusses the relationships between Corbusier's and Loos's ideologies in the ways that they compare and differ. One of these ideologies involves Corbusier's assertion that architecture belongs in the realm of art, while Loos believes that there are few applications for architecture in the artistic world. This intrigues me as it allows me to better understand what purpose they philosophically believe architecture and design serves, which ultimately guides their hand as they design. This will be helpful to apply as I read plans and sections from their projects.

Dahdah, Farès el-, and Stephen Atkinson. "The Josephine Baker House: For Loos's Pleasure." *Assemblage*, no. 26 (1995): 73–87. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171418>.

This reading details an analysis of Loos's intentions behind the design of the Baker House. More rooted in the design process than Loos's ideologies, this reading discusses the architectural implementations that Loos created that reflect a performative and

entirely impersonal aspect of this design for a home. Even if performative in nature, it is important to see the direct correlation made in writing between Loos as a designer, and his understanding of the creation of a home. He could have created this as any other space that could be public or private, but the fact that he intended this to be a home she could live in strikes me as an interesting intervention point for my thesis. It will help me to explore where these intentions become clear architecturally, and how to intervene on them in a way that substantiates my research.

Flores-Vianna, Miguel. *Rose Tarlow Living Room*. 2019. In Rose Tarlow, *Three Houses*, 34.

London: Vendome Press, 2022.

This is a photograph of Rose Tarlow's living room in Los Angeles. This photo exemplifies the integration and interruption of the natural in the built environment. Vines creep from the ceiling down into the living room and one has to almost move them aside as they enter. This seemingly Disney description actually reads far more naturally and subtle, almost as if the house and nature entirely intertwined over the years into a perfect marriage. This type of imagery is helpful to me in both directing my research but also my interventions in spaces in the realm of the unbuilt meeting the built and creating a moment.

Tolle, Eckhart, 1948-, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. New York, N.Y., Dutton/

Penguin Group, 2005.

In this book, Eckhart Tolle delves into the role of ego in our lives. Neither a good thing or a bad thing, he describes the ego as something that is ever present, and if we are conscious of the ego we are able to dis-identify with it and experience a more fully present and mindful life. In this mindful existence, people are no longer operating from past and future concerns. They are utterly present and able to relieve themselves of the pressures of the ego. This is related to my research as I believe it not only affects the way I will approach my work, but also, as a philosophy, effects the way I can argue the meaning behind these powerful “moments” I am searching for through design.

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Wright, Frank Lloyd (American architect, 1867-1959). *Taliesin*. 1911. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.8286828>.

Zumthor, Peter. *Thinking Architecture*. Second Expanded Edition. Boston, MA: Birkhauser, 2010.

Thesis abstract :

In passing out natural phenomena in the unbuilt environment, through admiring beauty, and emphasizing the ordinary, moments can be brought about that can cause you to be more present with yourself and the world we live in. Nevertheless, it is important to qualify that spaces that encompass these ordinary moments are not intended to be an "idealized space," but a domain that reconciles the chaos from the peaceful and the storm from the calm that is ever apparent in our daily lives. My thesis asks: Through critiquing the modernist condition of a prescriptive ideal space, how can we better understand how simple matters of nature and the ordinary in the personal domestic space include moments that make us utterly present with ourselves, and therefore the world around us. In order to develop this thesis, I will employ both a reduction and holistic approach. First, I will research and map out select homes from the modernist era, where a prescriptive space with the ideology of ultimate control over design was thought to bring about the ideal space, and therefore the ideal person. Using the confines of this ideology and an understanding of its iterations, I will contrast records of works by Adolf Loos, Mies Van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier, with my understanding of personality of space and apply a form of redlining, reconfiguration, and experimentation to further explore how breaking down this need for control will ultimately yield a space that allows us to be more present. I intend to make these intentions on plans, sections, elevations, photographs, and models of their projects. After making these assertions, I will step back and gather my findings holistically to make the argument that intention domestically to create peace and give us the opportunity to gain a sense of self does

not come from a hunt for the ideal but from the intersection of calm and chaos, which mirrors a paradox apparent in our lives. It is through the understanding of control or lack thereof in a space that we can also understand more broadly how we interact with ourselves and the world. Understanding the poetry of space, and its ever present ability to captivate us through utterly normal, but highly memorable moments seems to be a philosophy not just applied to design, but one we can apply to our lives as a whole.

Julia McArthur

Thesis Abstract

In teasing out natural phenomena in the unbuilt environment, through admiring beauty, and emphasizing the ordinary, meaningful moments can be brought about that can cause you to be more present with yourself and the world we live in. It is important to qualify that these spaces that encompass “ordinary” moments are not intended to be “idealized spaces,” but a domain that reconciles the chaos from the peaceful and the stress from the calm that is ever apparent in our daily lives. My thesis asks: Through critiquing the modernist condition of a prescriptive ideal space, how can we better understand how simple matters of nature and the ordinary in the personal domestic space invite moments that make us utterly present with ourselves and therefore the world around us. In order to develop this thesis I will develop a language to define what I am referring to as “encounters” and “non-encounters” in the domestic space. These pertain to certain phenomena that occur in space surrounding ideas of embodiment, framing, light, texture, spontaneity, and the senses. Using the lens of my childhood home, where I experienced my first encounters, I will carve through projects of canonical architects, determining which projects were successful at bringing about phenomenal encounters and why. I will also study the inverse—which projects were unsuccessful and why. I will differentiate between architects that deeply aligned with a prescriptive design manifesto, and those that seemed to allow for spontaneity of spirit in their design. I will do this by researching and mapping out select homes designed by Adolf Loos, Mies Van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Peter Eisenman, Ricardo Bofill and Frank Lloyd Wright. I will apply a form of redlining, reconfiguration, and experimentation in drawing to further explore how breaking down this need

for control will ultimately yield the opportunity for a space that allows us to be more present—that captivates us. I intend to make these interventions on plans, sections, elevations, photographs, and models of their projects. After making these assertions, I will step back and gather my findings through developing a new diagrammatic language to make the argument that intervention domestically to create peace and give us the opportunity to gain a sense of self does not come from a hunt for the ideal but from a mindset that allows for the spontaneity of that moment to exist. It is through the understanding of control or lack thereof in space that we can understand more broadly how we interact with ourselves and the world. Ultimately I will argue that my childhood home, a tract home, was successful at bringing about these spatial encounters despite the fact that it was not crafted by the hand of a canonical architect. Understanding the poetry of space and its ability to captivate us through utterly normal, but highly memorable moments is perhaps the beginning of a design manifesto. The manifesto, however, is not a rule book. Rather it is a mindset that helps us as designers to step back and recall that the design process does not start and finish with the controlled hand of the designer. The design process is only completed with the full embodiment of the space by the dweller themselves.

The database:

Index:

The ordinary and the built:

Rose Tarlow
Luis Barragan
Ricardo Bofill
Axel Vervoordt
Peter Zumthor

Prescriptive Homes:

Adolf Loos - Josephine Baker House

Le Corbusier - Villa La Roche

Mies van der Rohe - Farnsworth House

Mind Space:

Ernst Jell
Dr. Bruce Pomy
Dr. Nadea Lepera
Bened Van der Kolk
Lan Kitchin

Key Terms:

Unbuilt/natural:
beauty, unexpected, sanctuary
types, holistic, spectacular,
mundane, ordinary, stimuli,
sensory input

mental:
useful, summer, sound,
consciousness, belonging,
dwelling, memory, affect,
awe, wonder

architectural:

domesticity
home
moment

Julia Isabelle McArthur
Theris Deausine Workshop

metric

declamation:

through critiquing the modernist
perspective/condition of a prescriptive
ideal space, how can we better
understand how simple matters of
nature and the ordinary in the
personal domestic space invite
moments that make us utterly present
with ourselves and consequently the
world around us.

list of criteria:

this thesis will:

- attempt to uncover hidden
moments within previously
understood conventions
- hope to give the audience a
more holistic understanding of
design

this thesis will not:

- propose a point of
view to be taken
singularly.

hypothesis:

the "hunch" would be
that harshly prescribed
design conventions may
lack the space for the
ordinary things in life
that reflect our most
personal selves.

the effect would be that
we blindly follow design
prescriptions that
eventually cause us
to make/align ourselves
to versions of ourselves
instead of experiencing moments
that bring us closer to our
authentic self.

flowchart

idea of domestic space,
the moments within it
that stick with us, &
how this moment takes
prescriptive qualities of
design.

↓
designing homes seems to
entail manufacturing
spaces to be a type or
a way to direct the way
of life for a person in
the home / moments that
are actually meaningful
are not generated from
these prescriptive qualities

(precedent)
modernist designers
such as Adolf
Loos, Corbusier,
Mies van der Rohe,
have built homes
promoting a
prescriptive
attitude

Methodology

personal
experience as
one lent
to judge
these spaces

↓
leaves out
room for the
psychology
behind the
way we
experience life

↓
moments
in the home,
areas of refuge,
natural
qualities of
these spaces,
memory

ending option 1:

↳ unknown on
modernist homes
to demonstrate
the anti-prescription

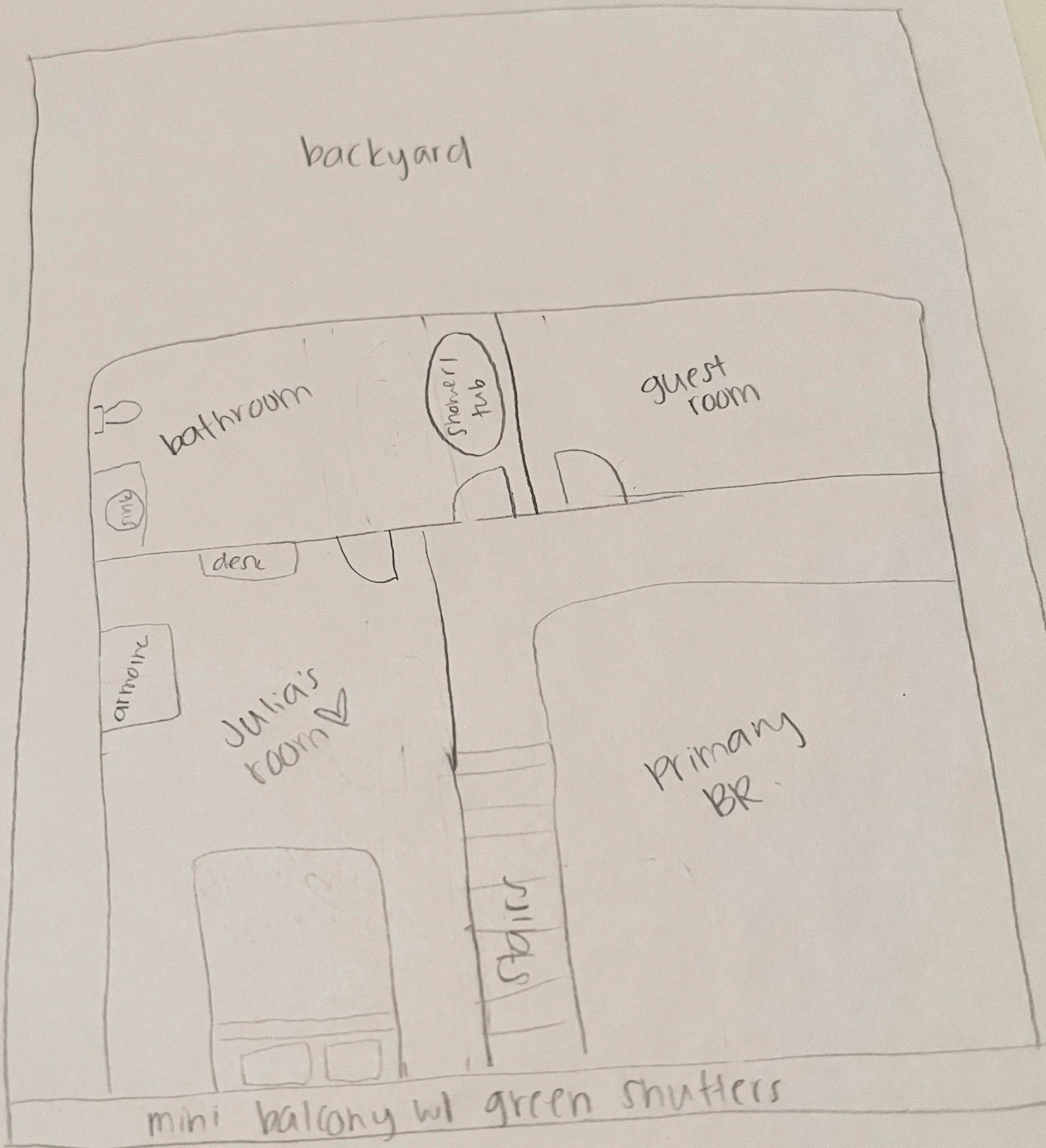
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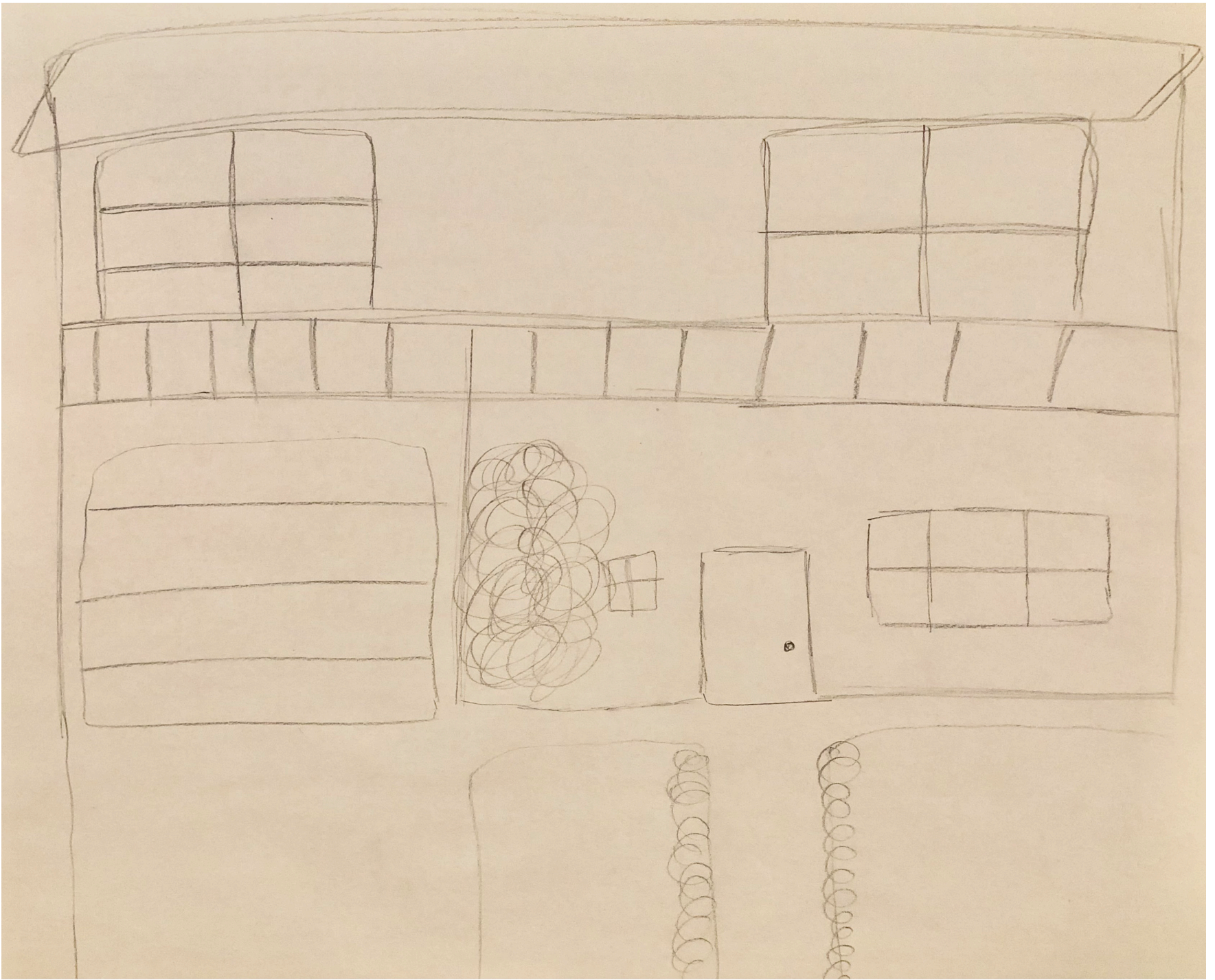
↳ writings and studies
of various qualities
that are identifiable
from personal
experience.

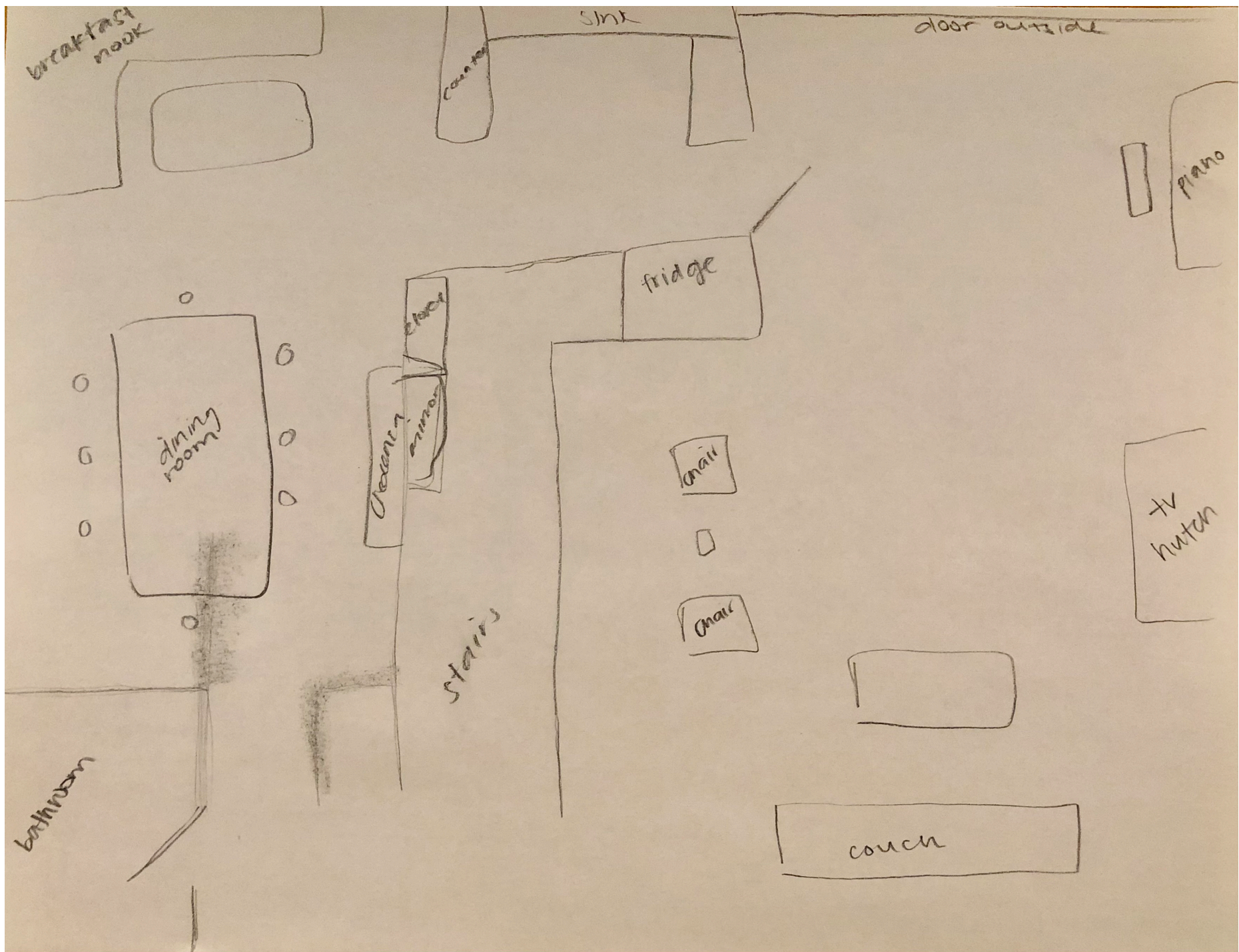
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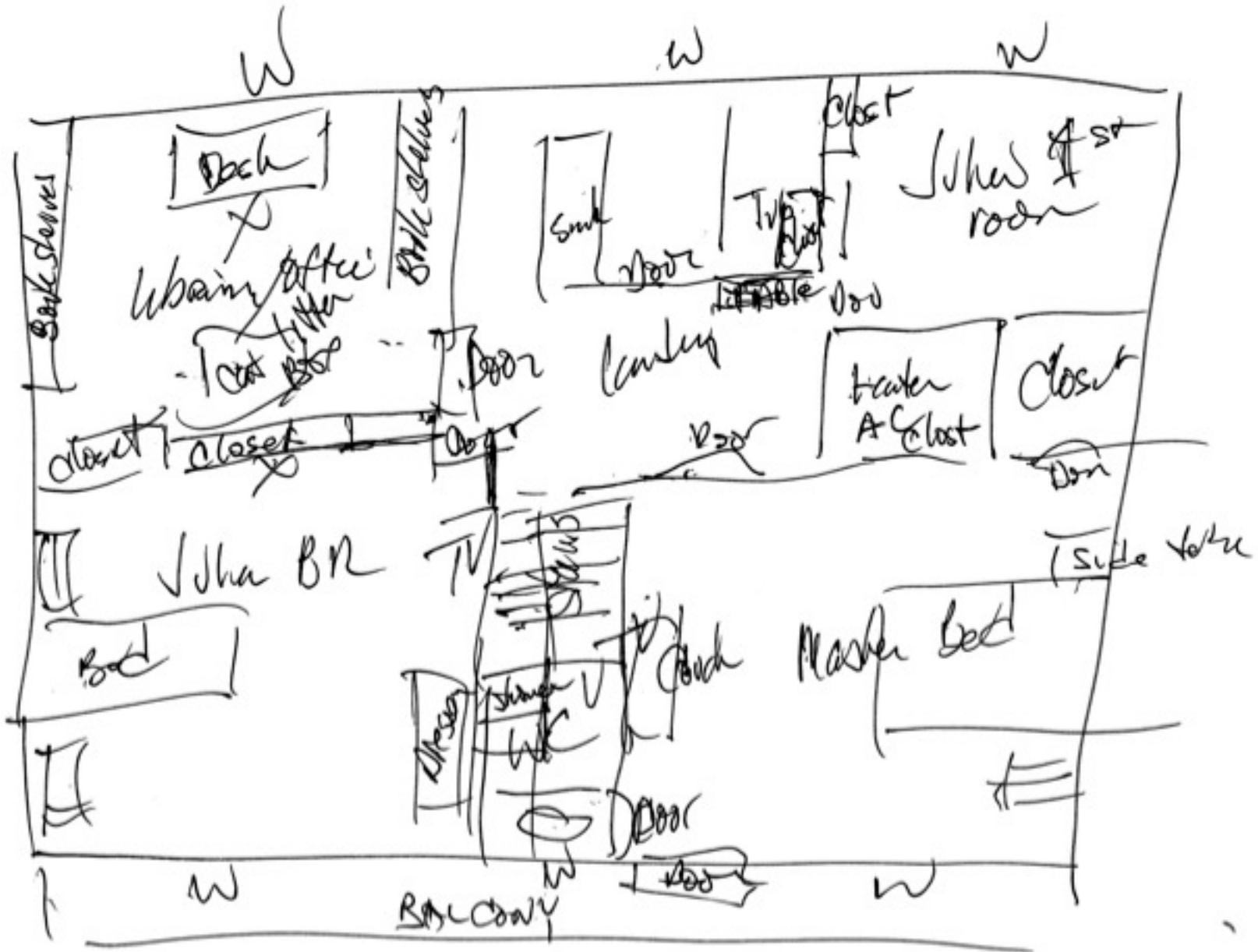
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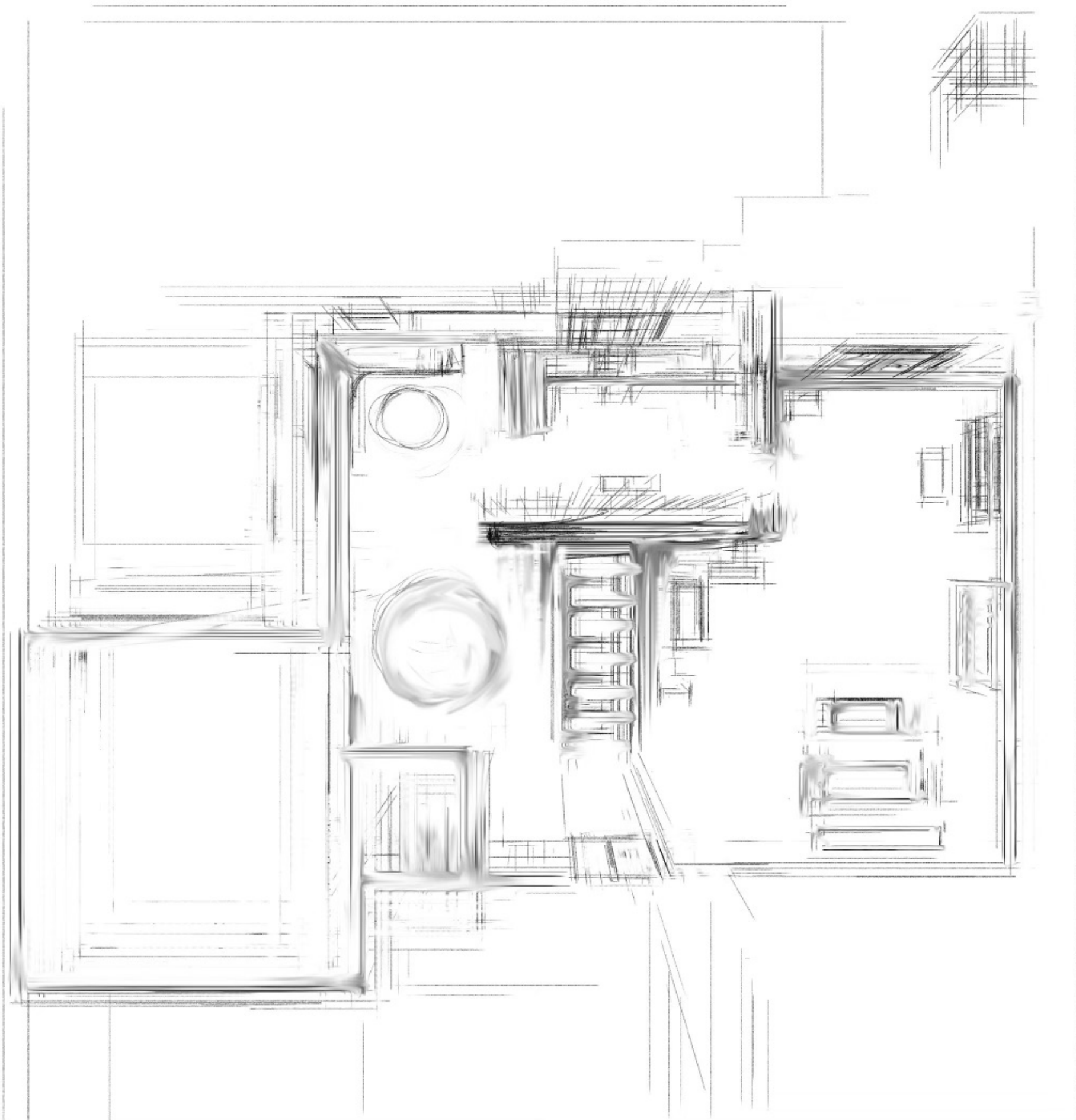




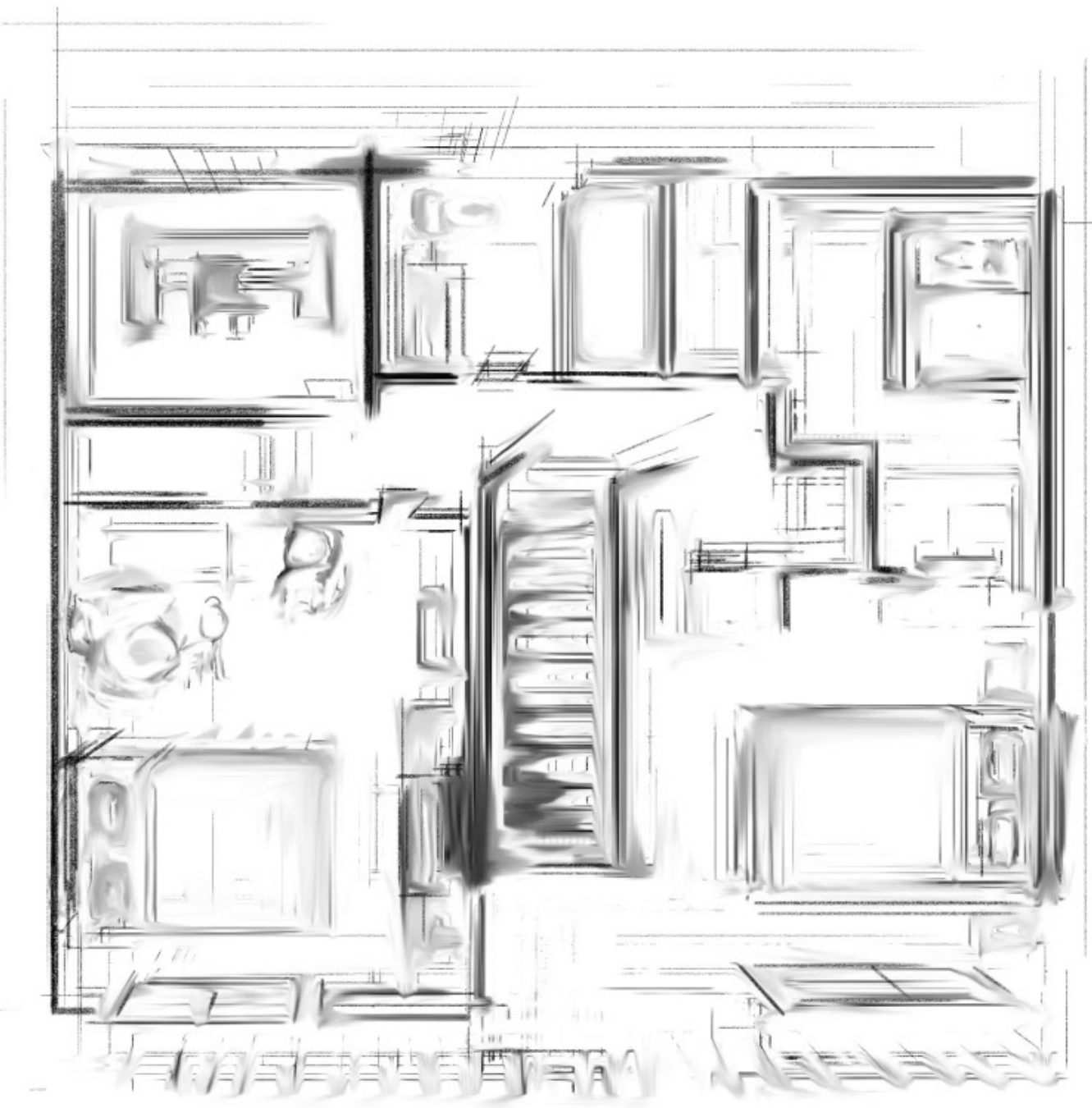
2nd Floor



~~Map~~ Map

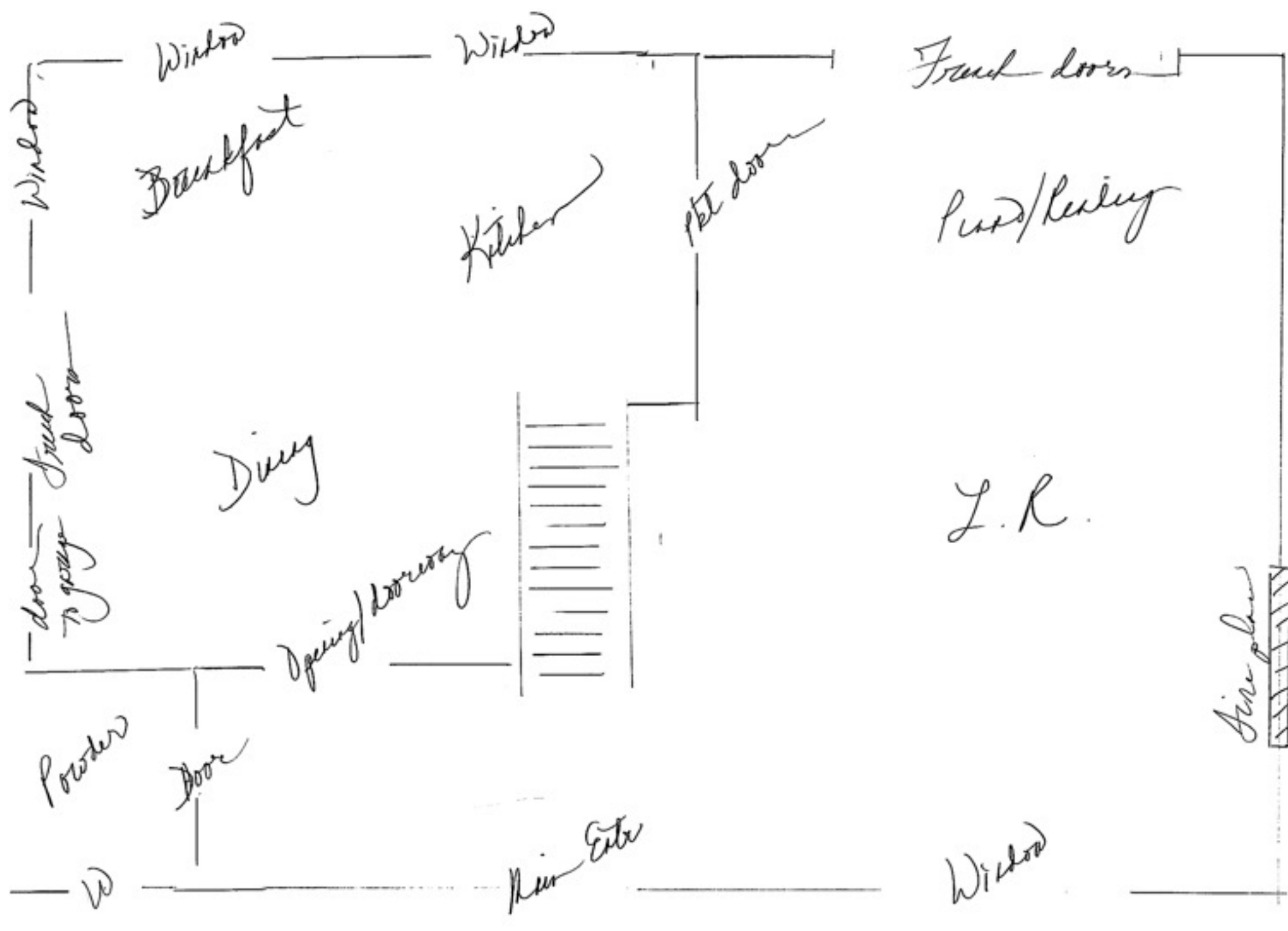


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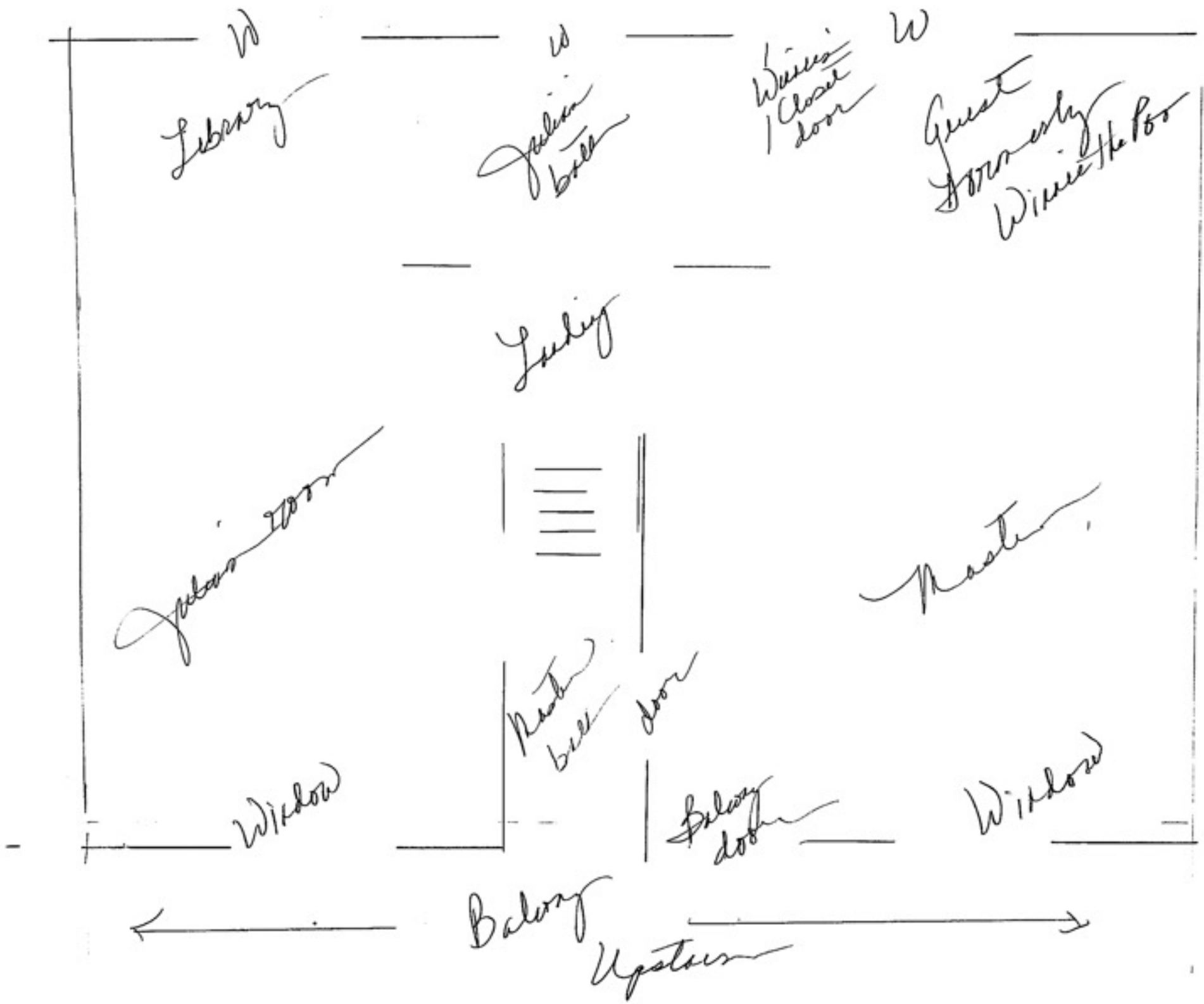


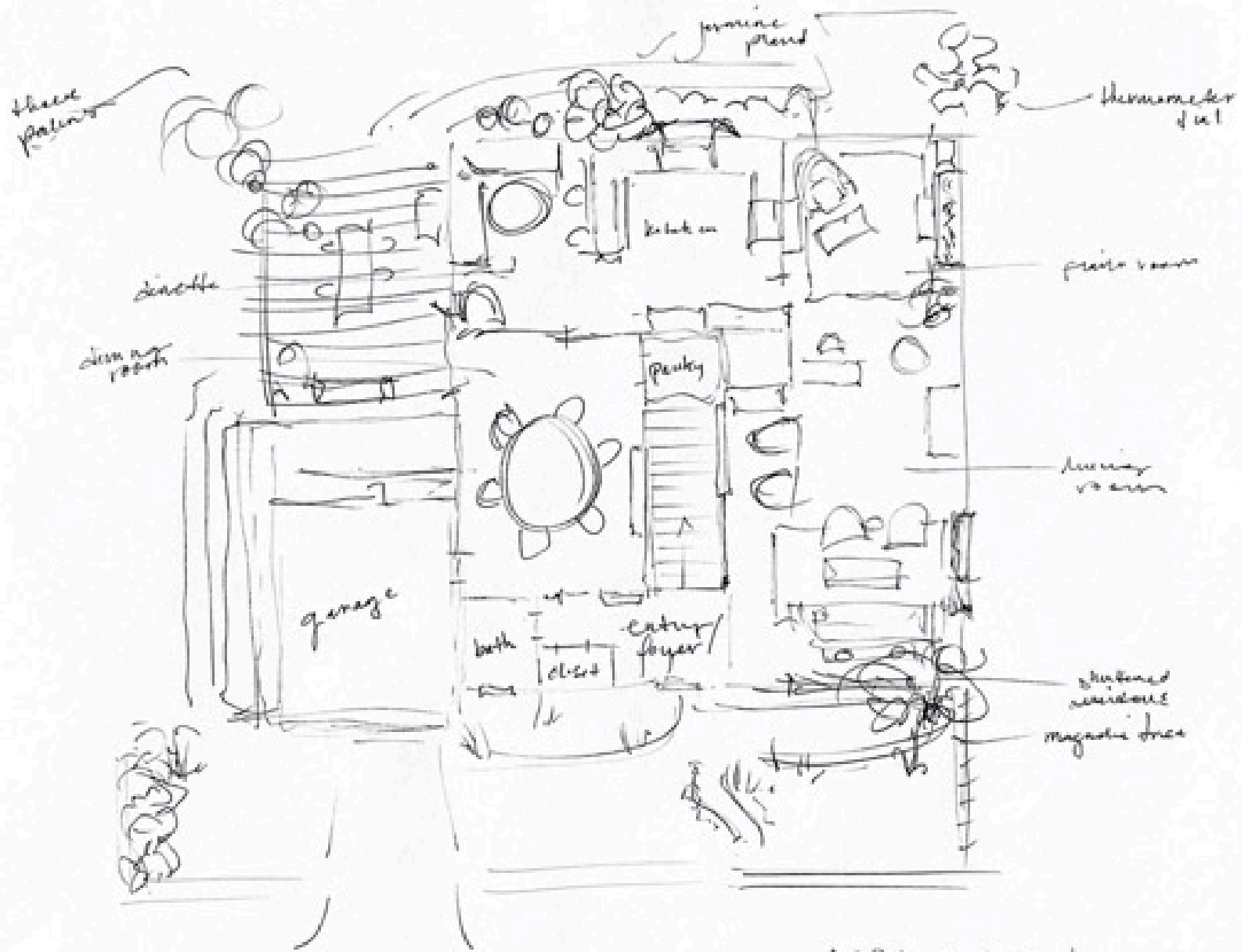




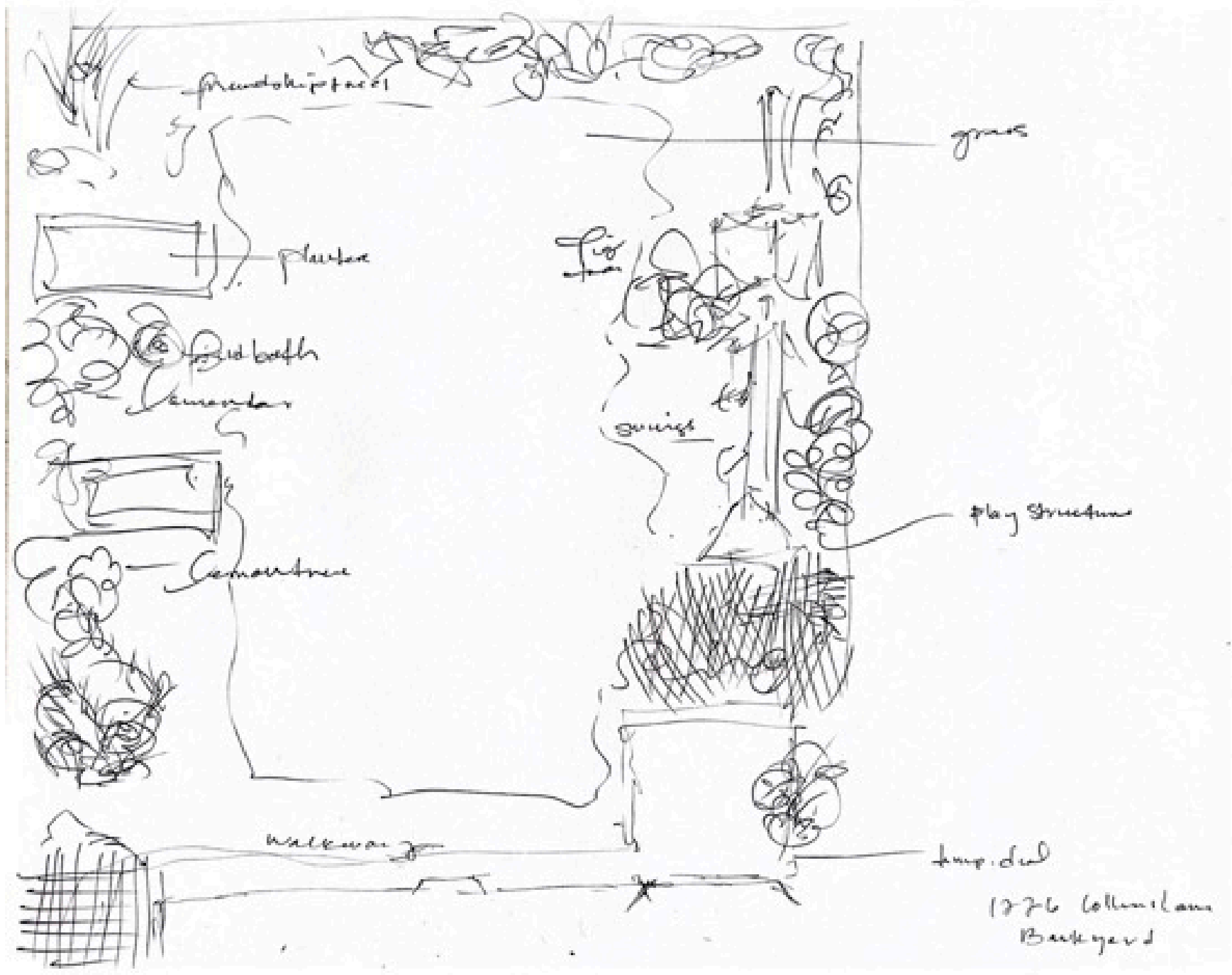


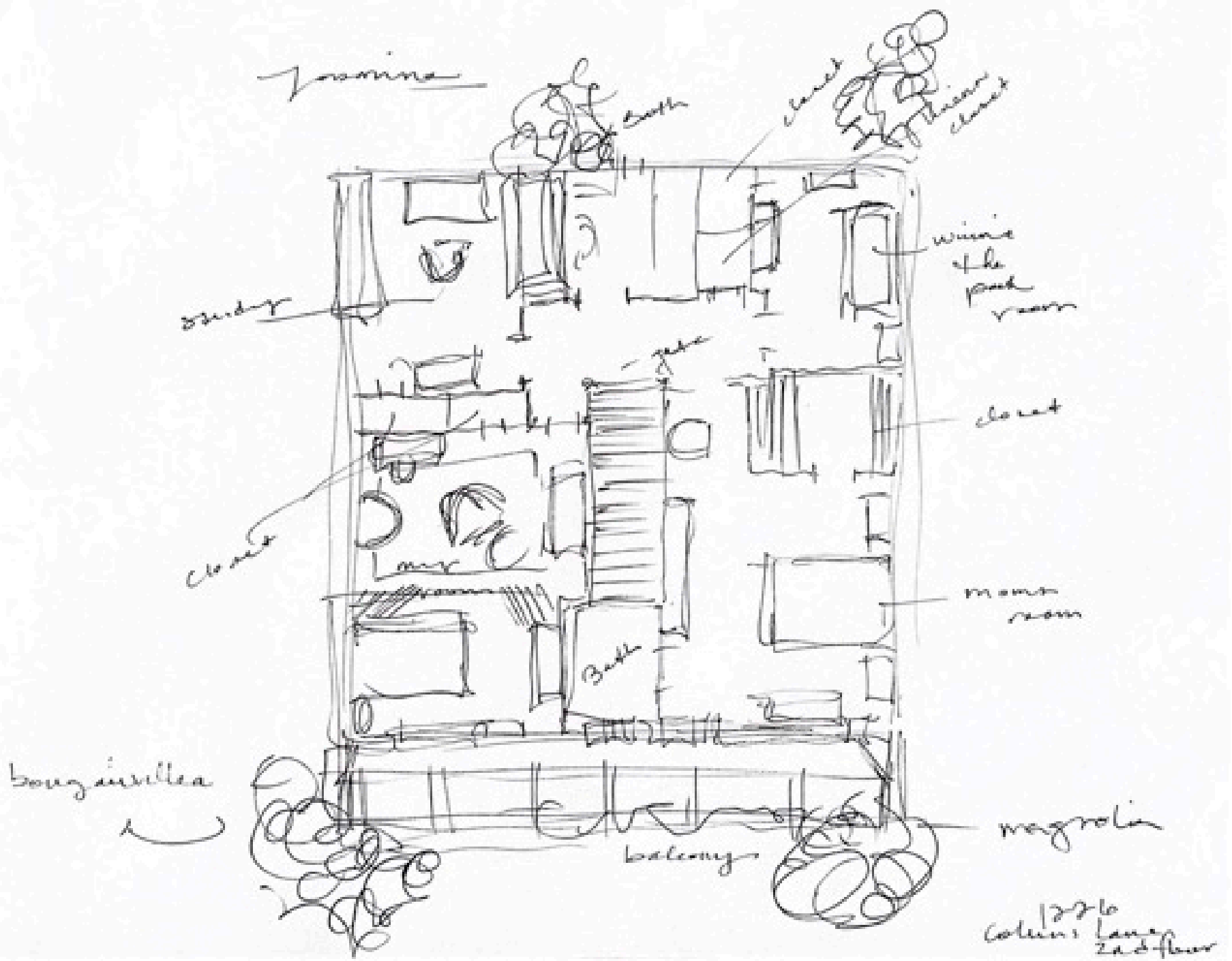
First/Floor



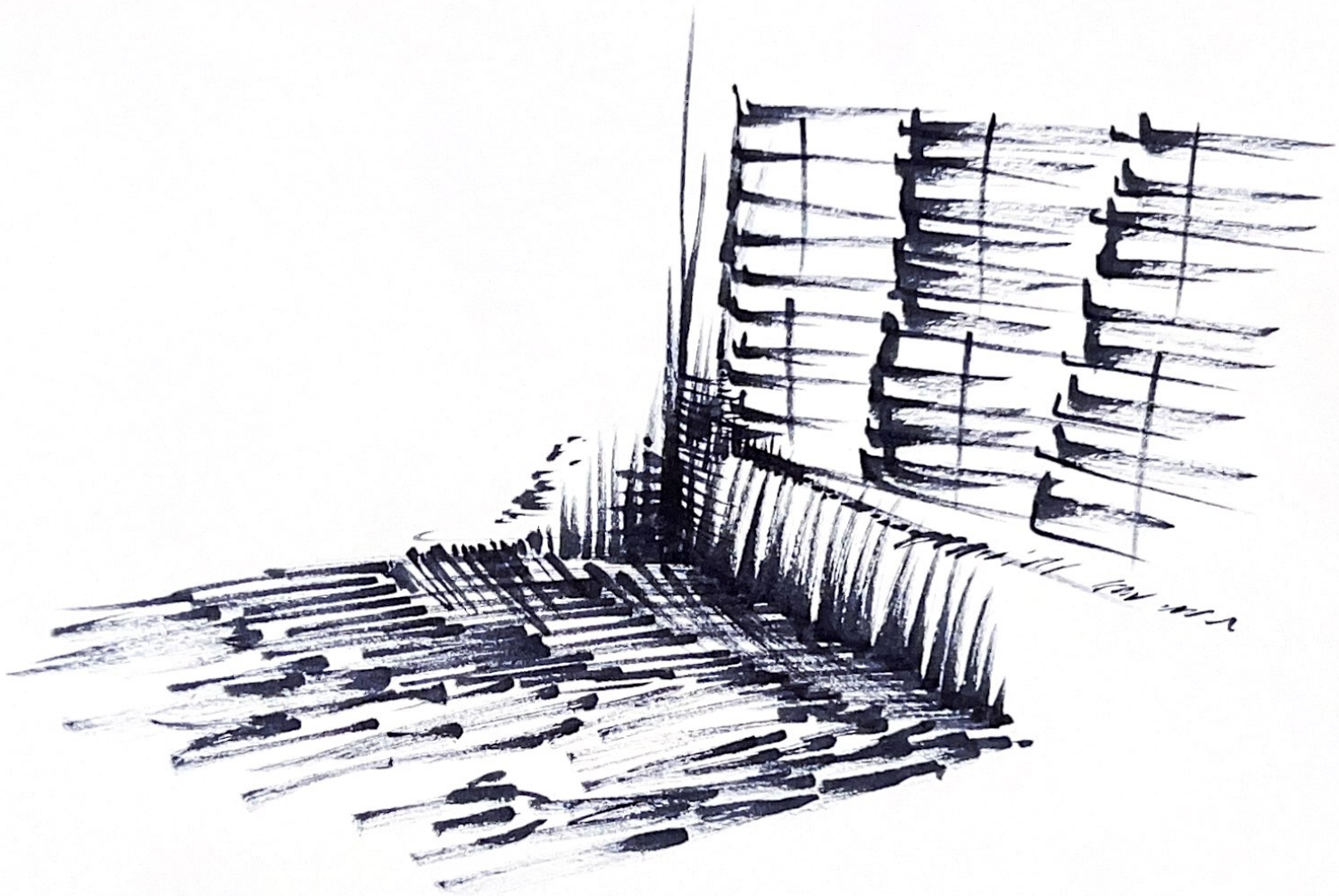


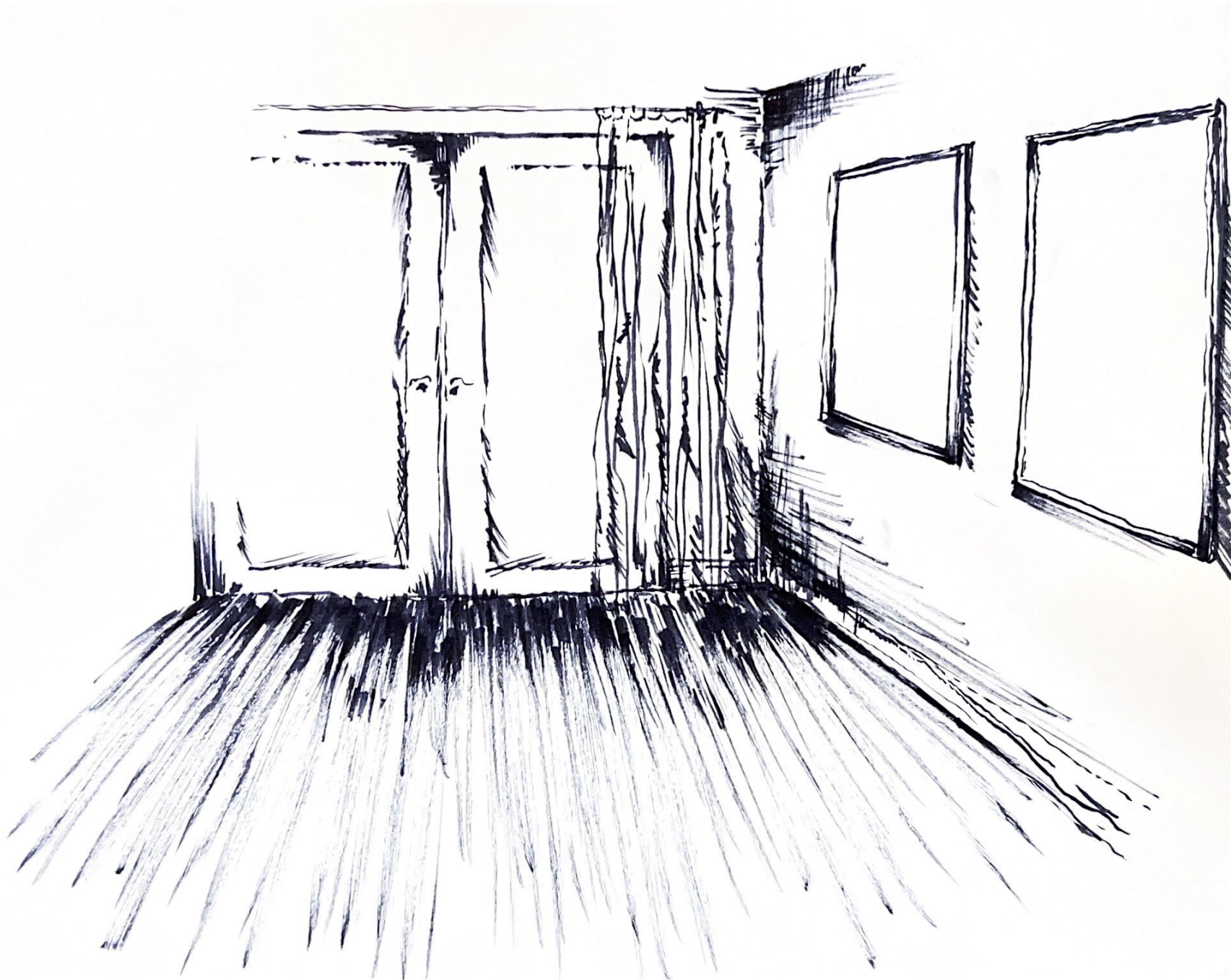
1276 Collins Lane
- first floor













WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DWELL

JULIA MCARTHUR

RISD THESIS 2023



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THROUGH CRITIQUING THE MODERNIST CONDITION OF A PRESCRIPTIVE
IDEAL SPACE, HOW CAN WE BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW SIMPLE
MATTERS OF **NATURE** AND THE **ORDINARY** IN THE PERSONAL DOMESTIC
SPACE INVITE MOMENTS THAT MAKE US UTTERLY **PRESENT** WITH
OURSELVES AND THEREFORE THE WORLD AROUND US?

PART I
THE ENCOUNTER

JULIA MCARTHUR

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ENCOUNTER:
A COMPLETE EMBODIMENT OF SPACE THAT IS
SANCTUARY-LIKE, INSPIRES AWE, AND IN THIS
WAY COMMANDS UTTER PRESENCE; IT IS A
MEANINGFUL MEMORY.



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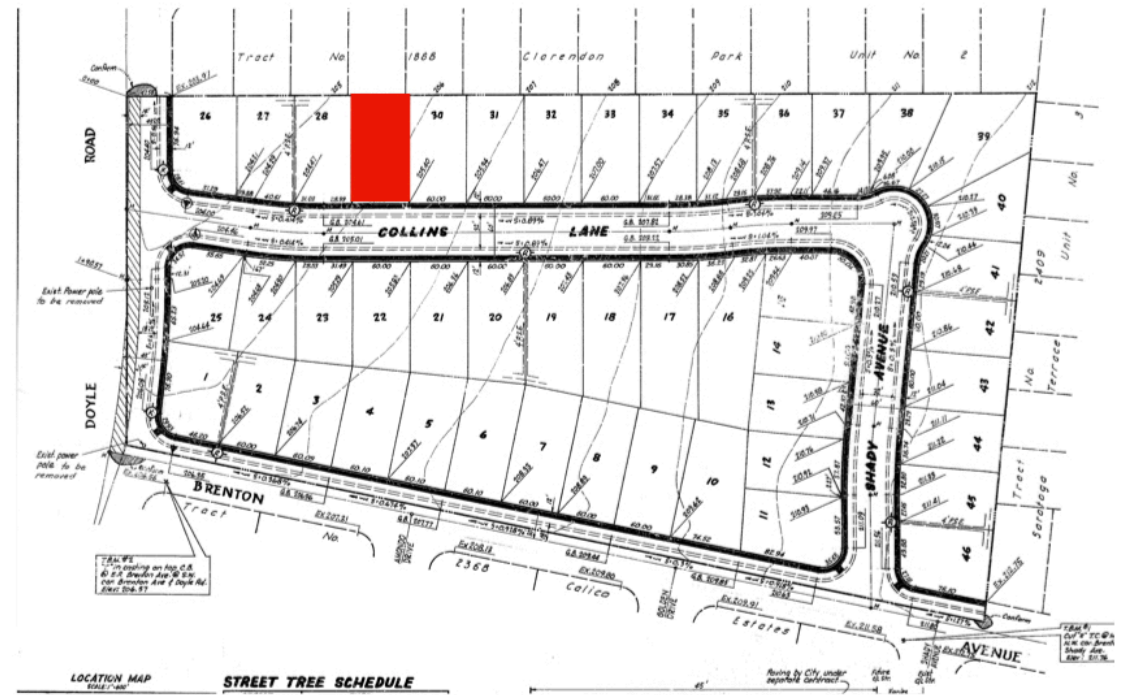
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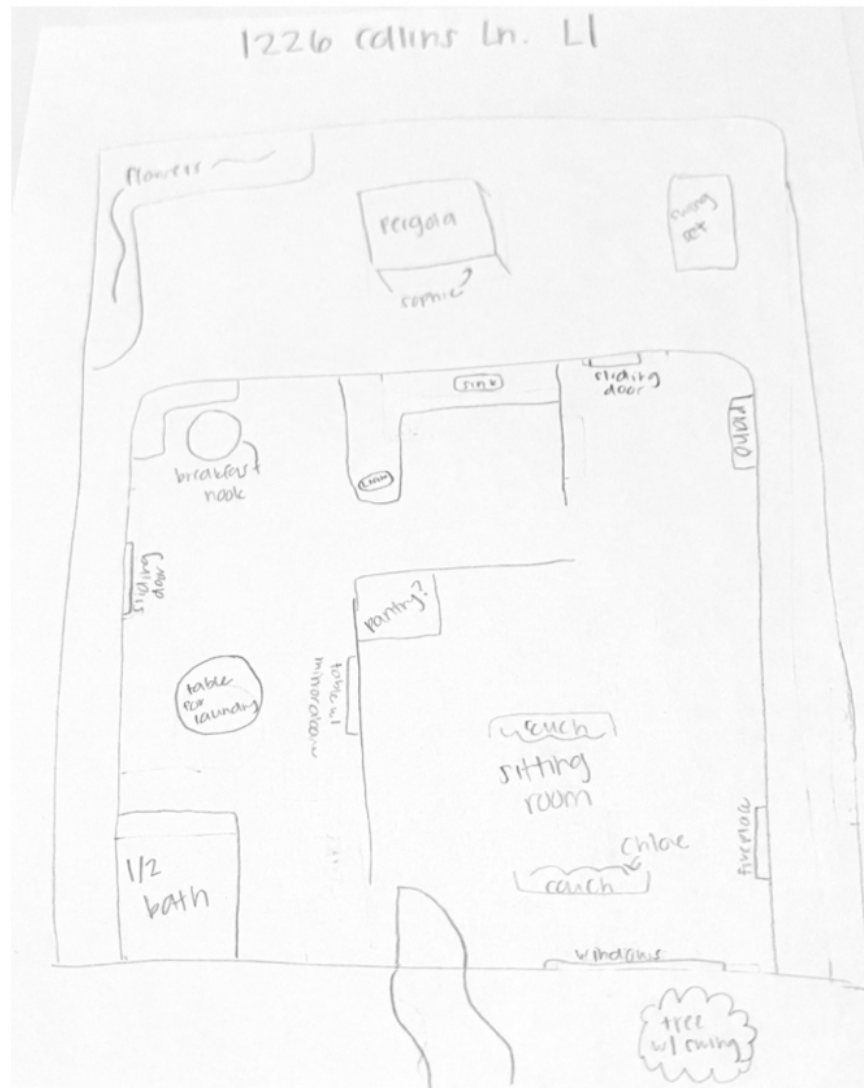
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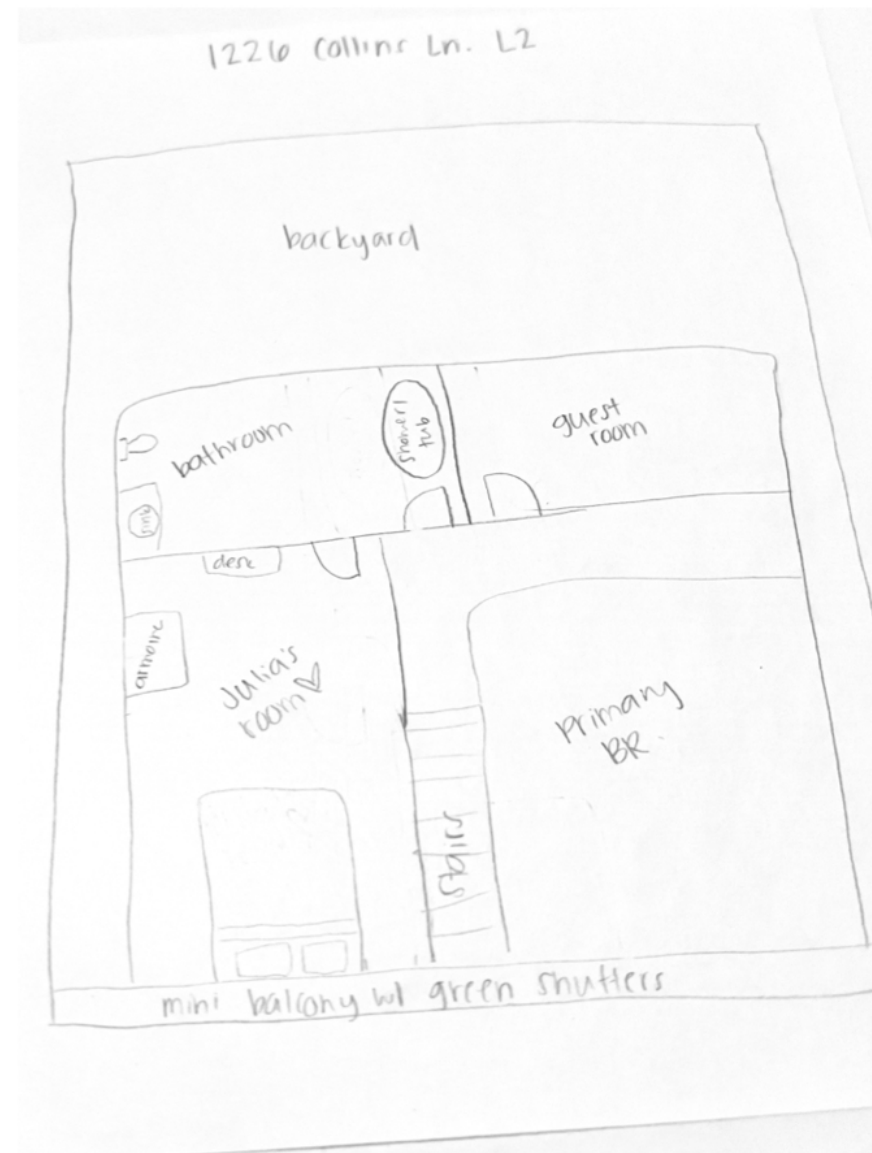


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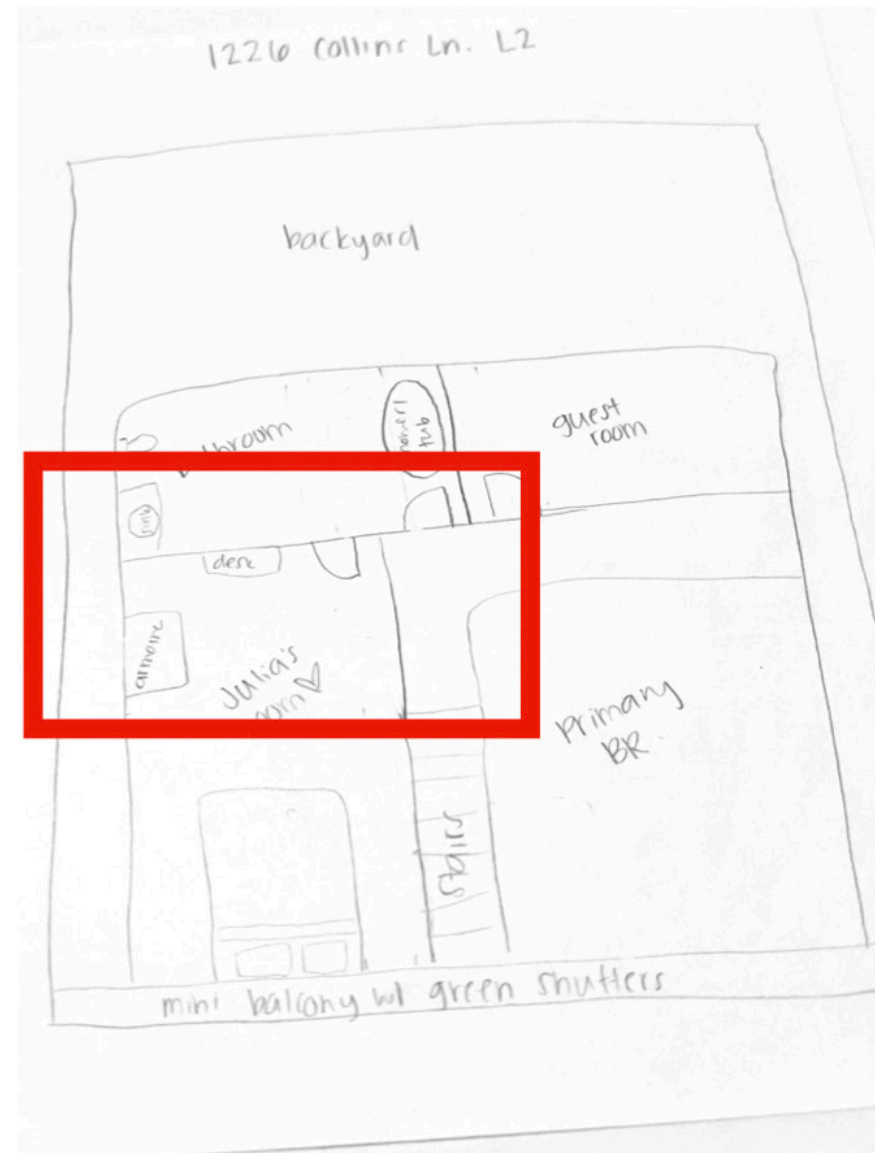
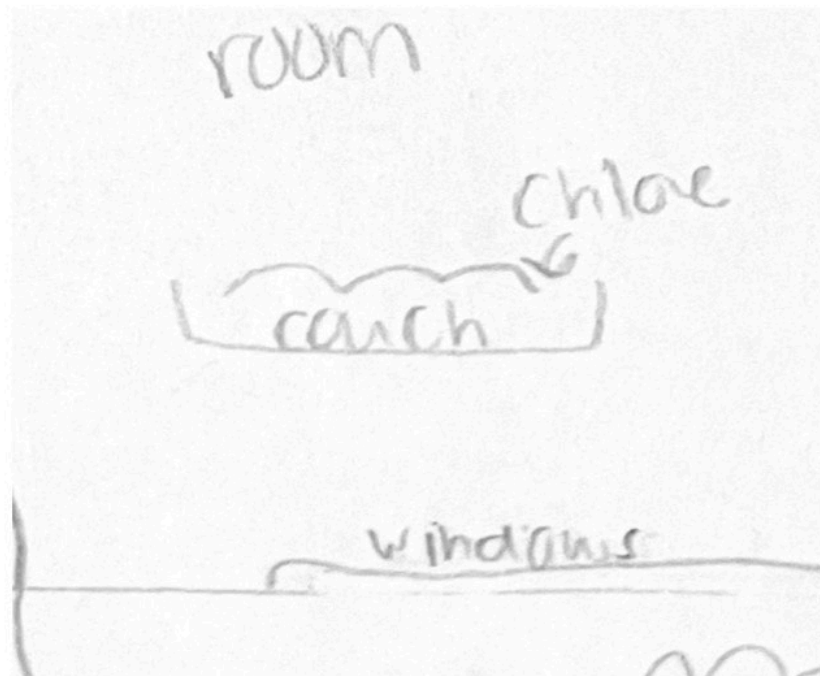
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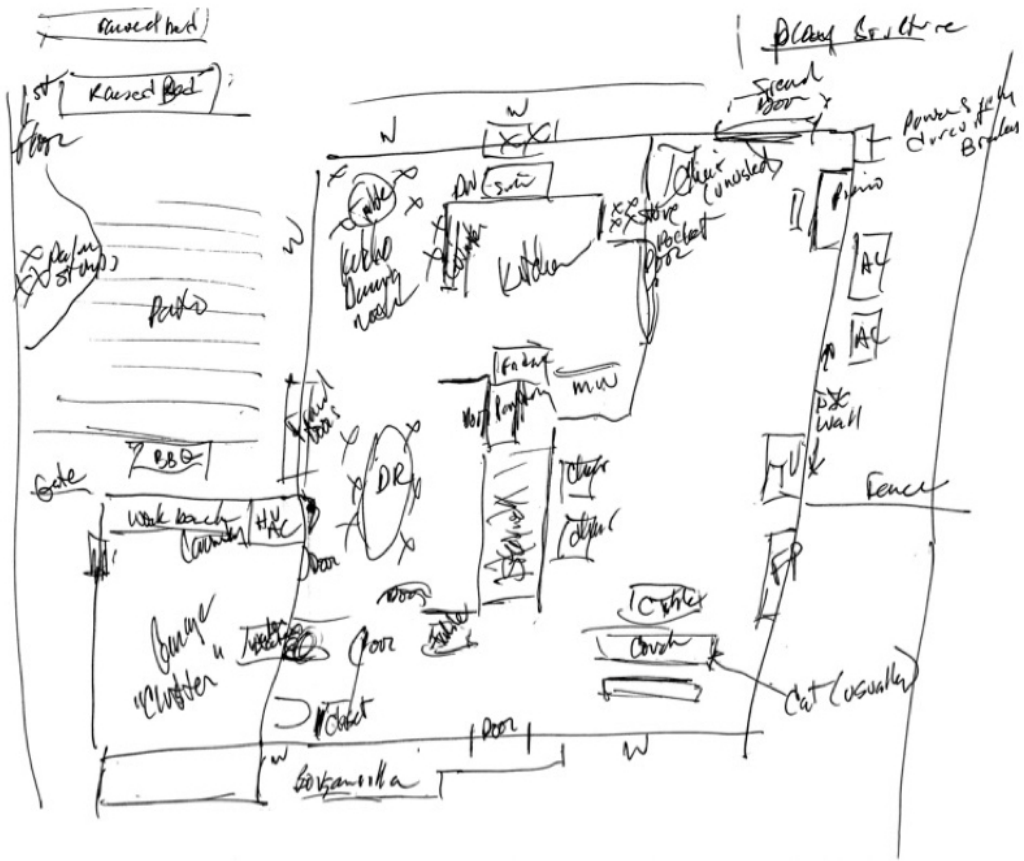


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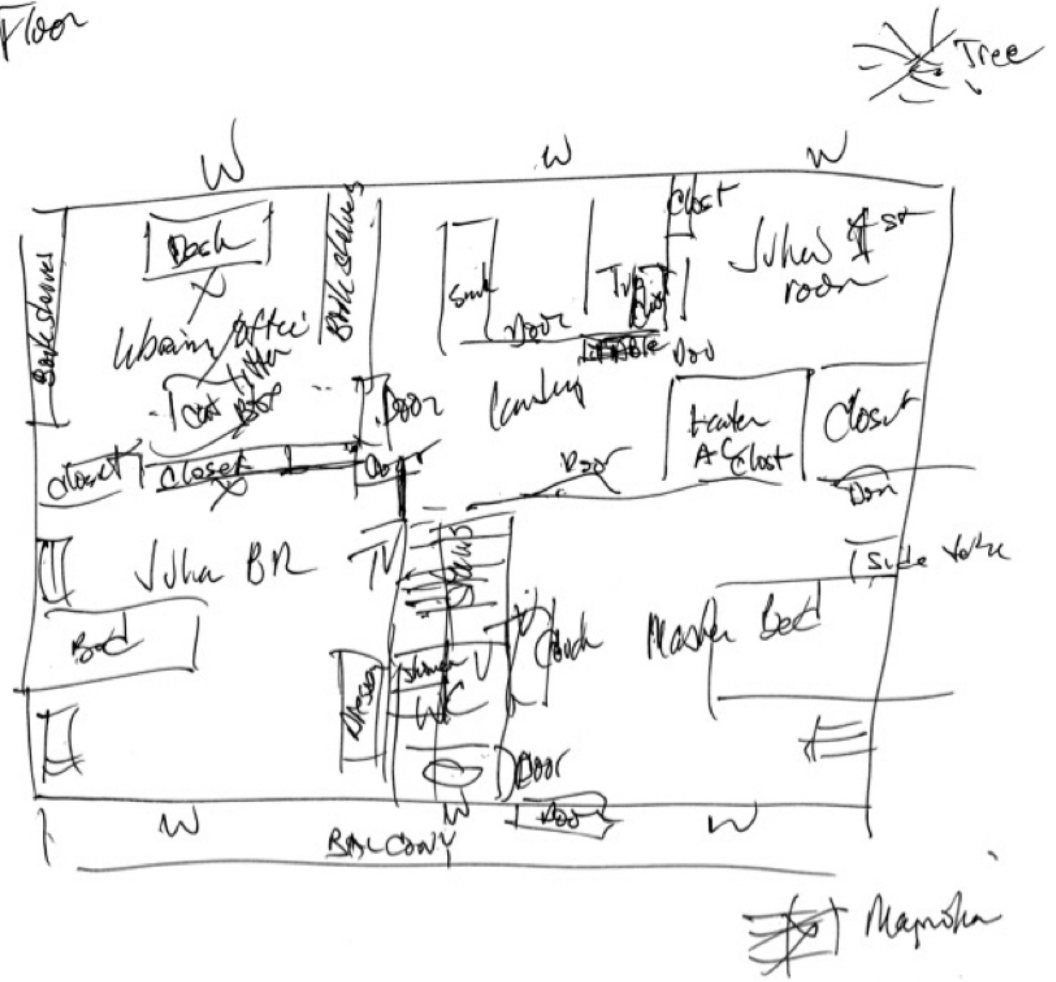
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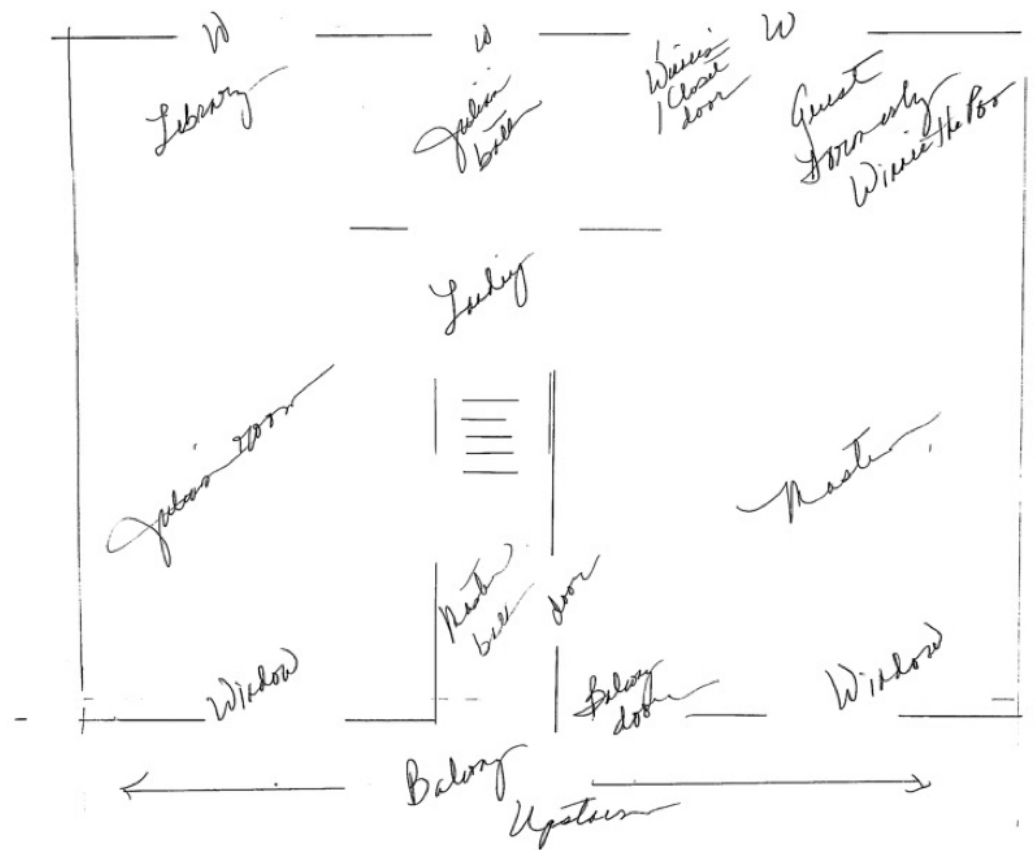
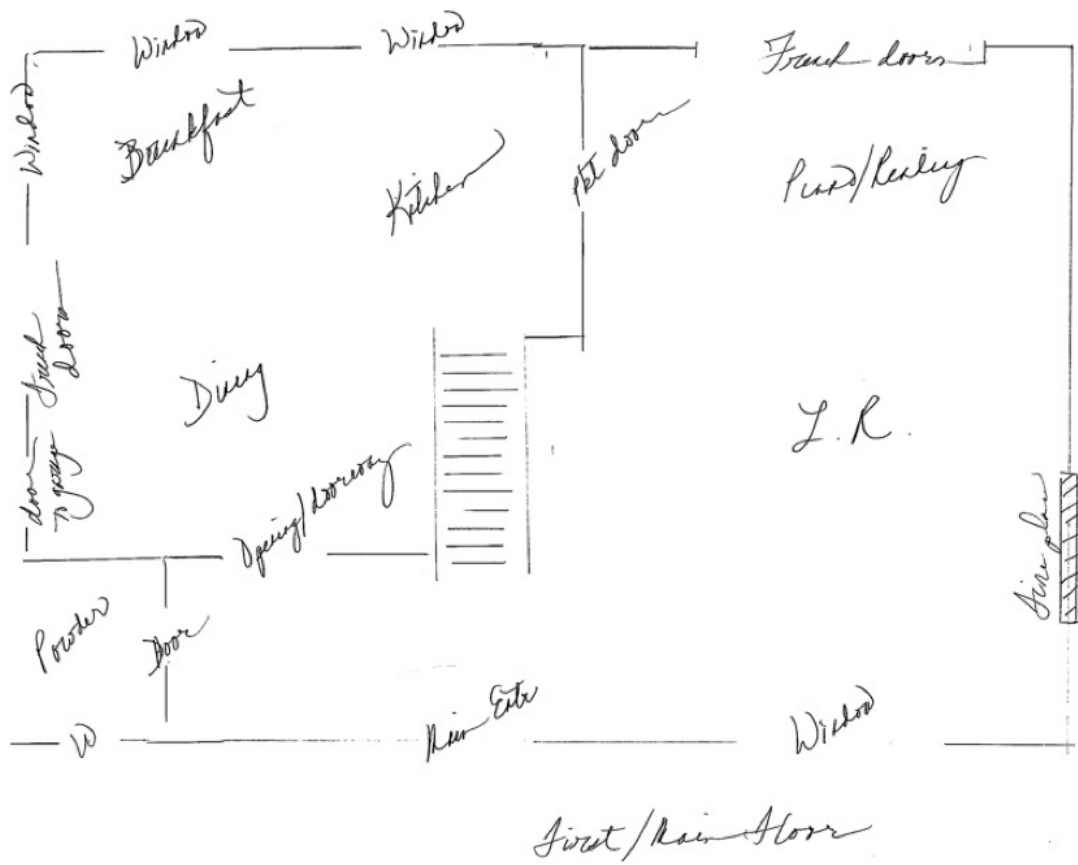


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2nd Floor

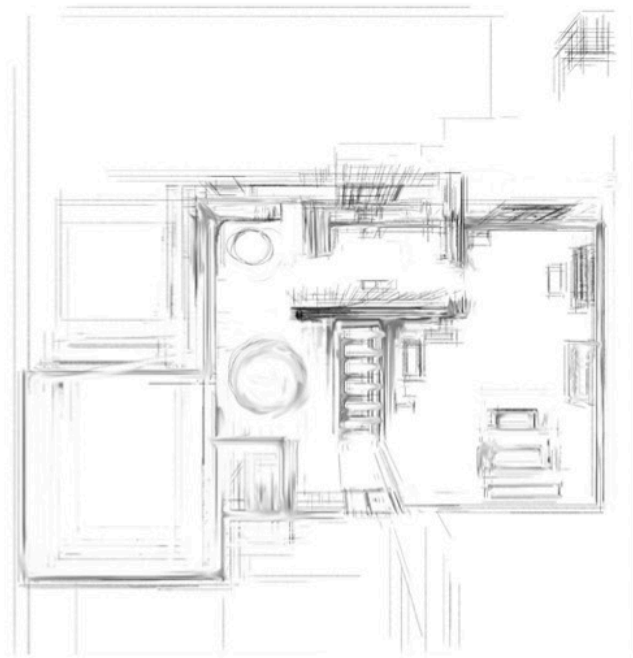
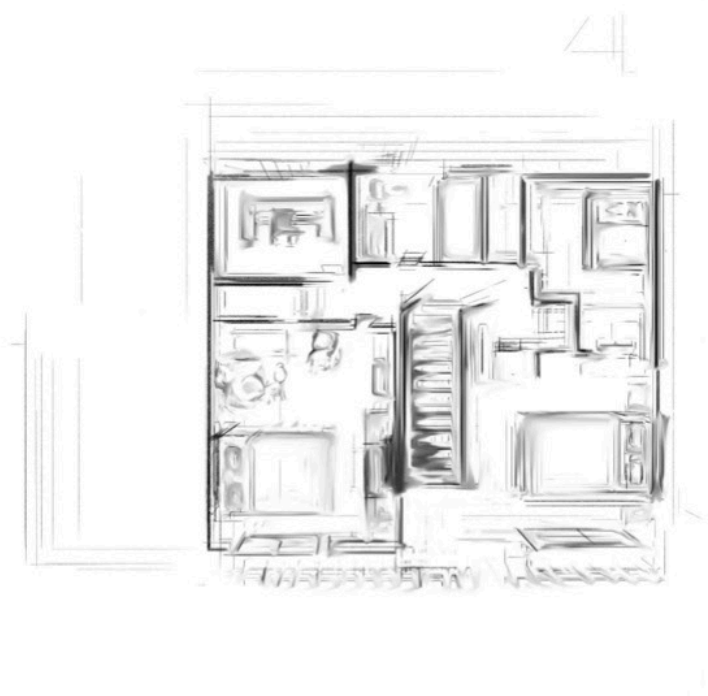


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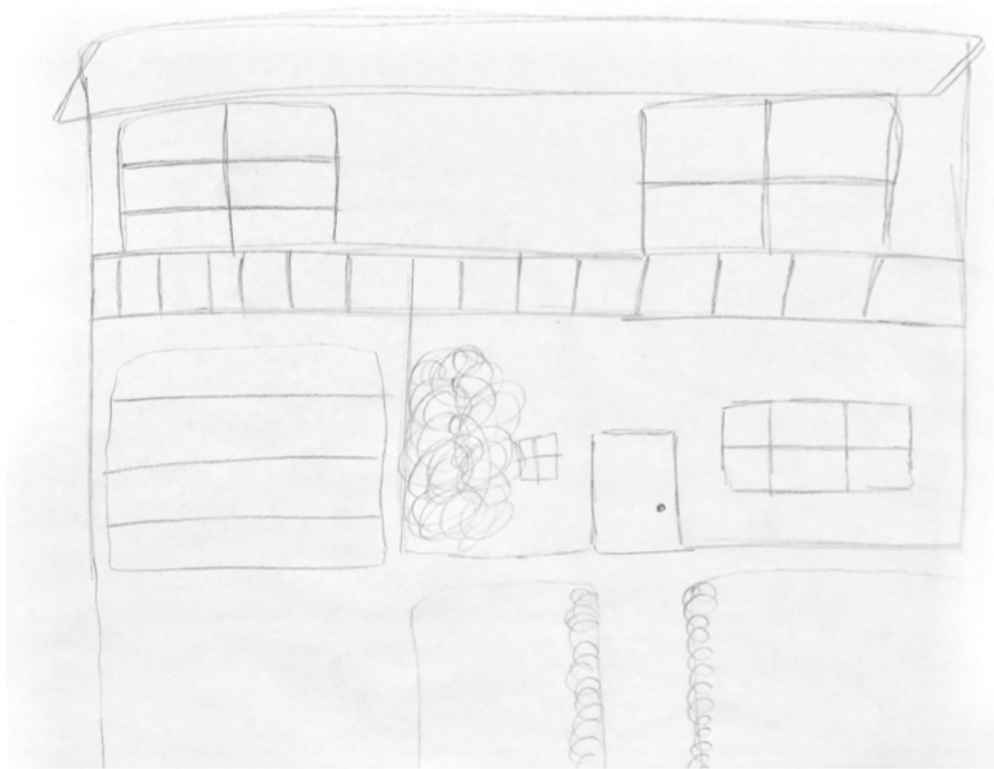
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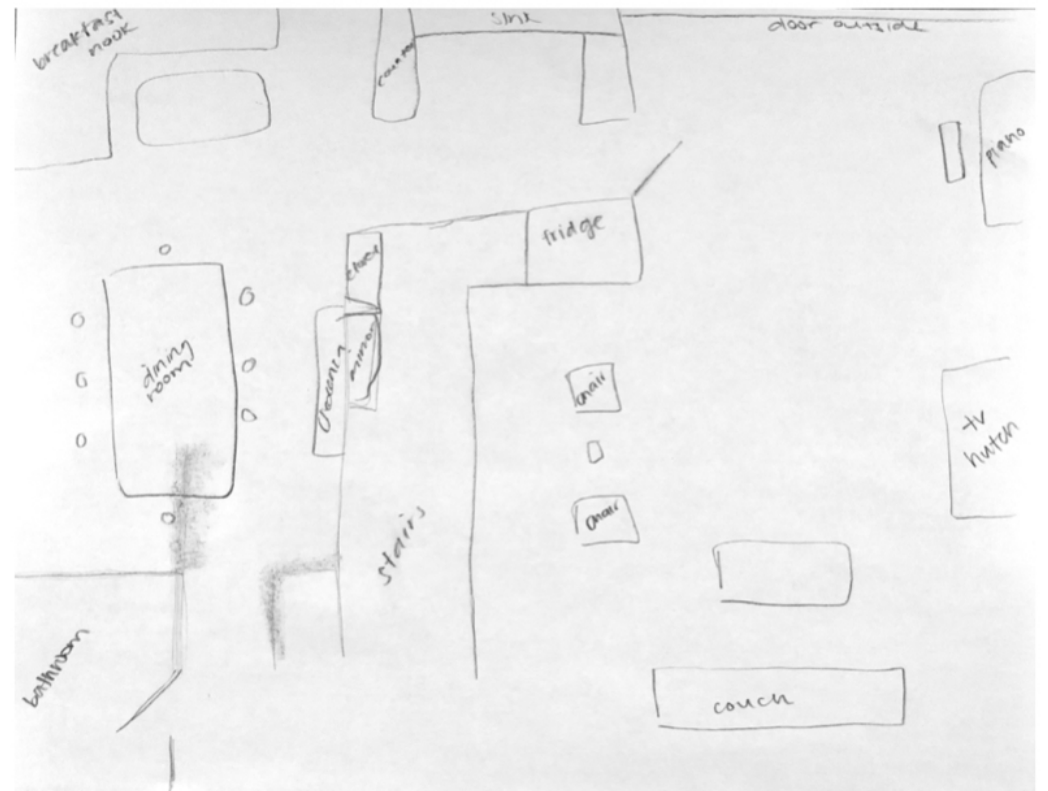


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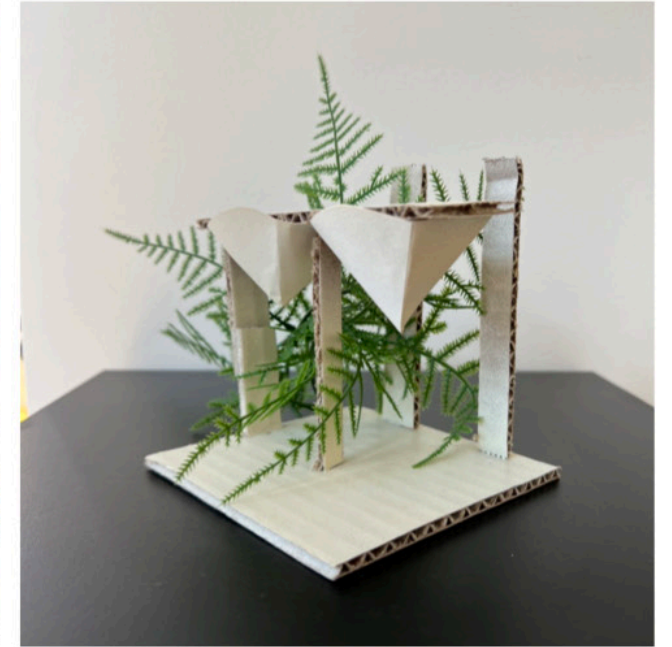
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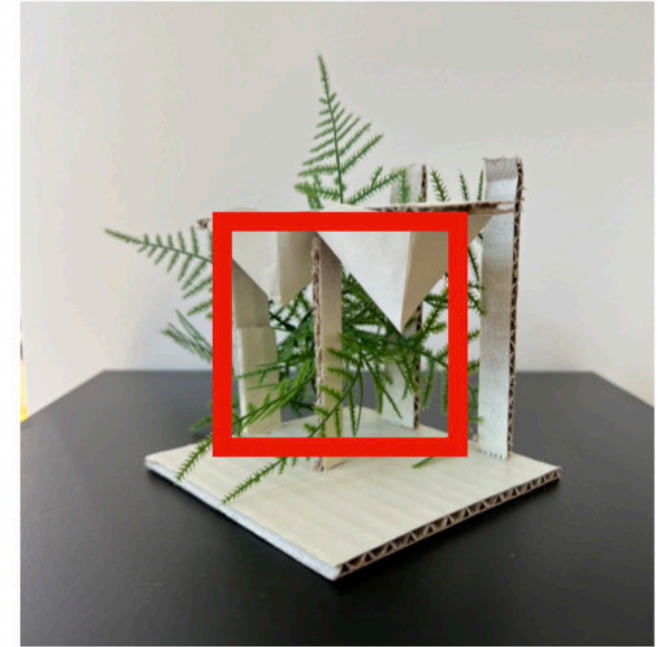
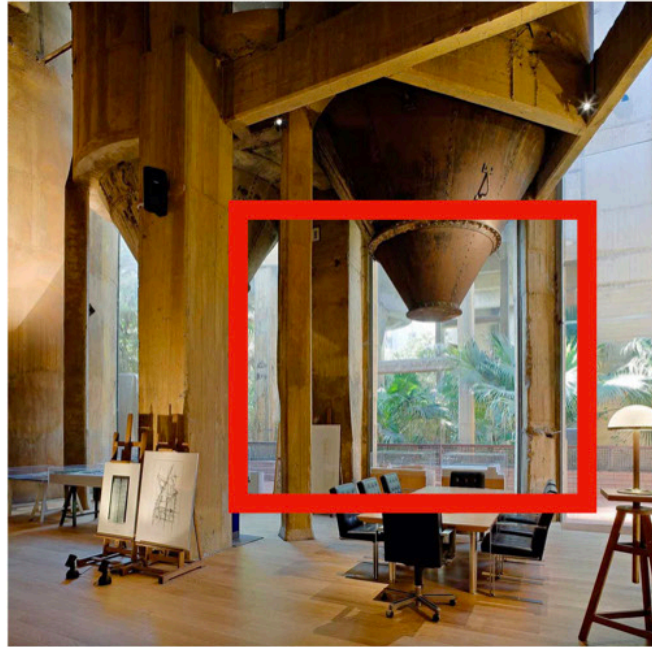


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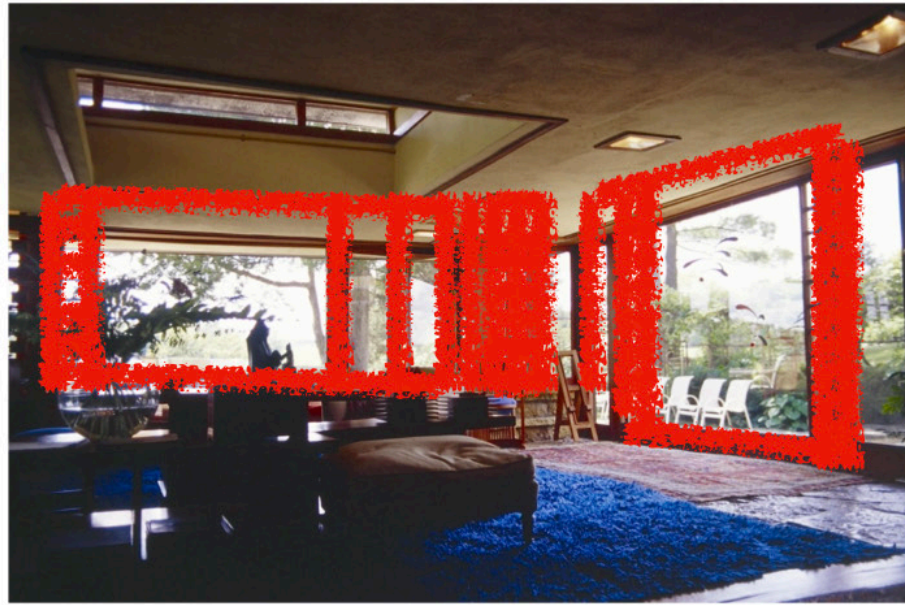


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PART II
THE NON
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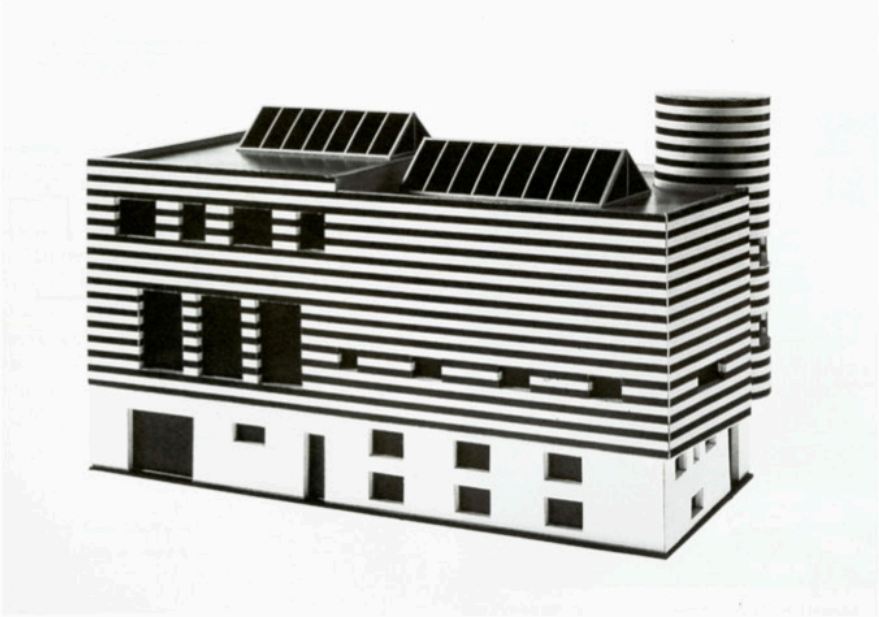
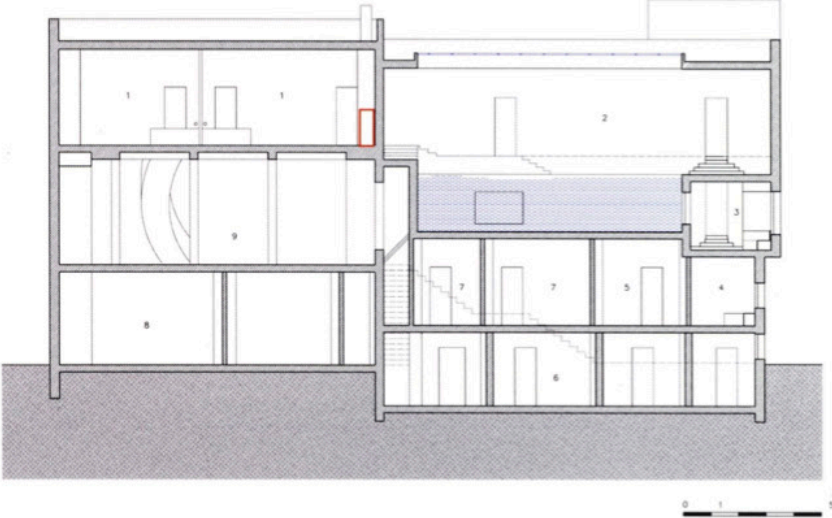
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CORBUSIER: A HOUSE IS A MACHINE FOR LIVING IN

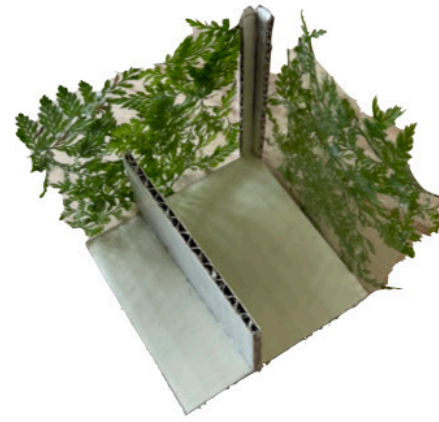
EISENMAN: THE ARCHITECTURE WE REMEMBER IS
THAT WHICH NEVER CONSOLES OR COMFORTS US.

ANTI-THESIS



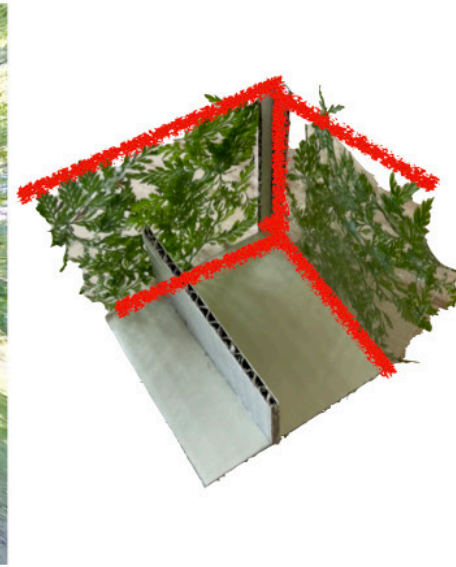
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RISD THESIS 2023



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RISD THESIS 2023



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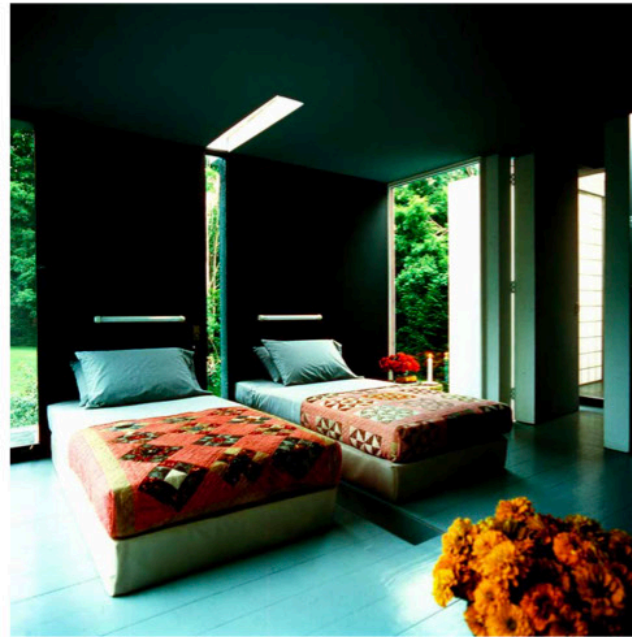
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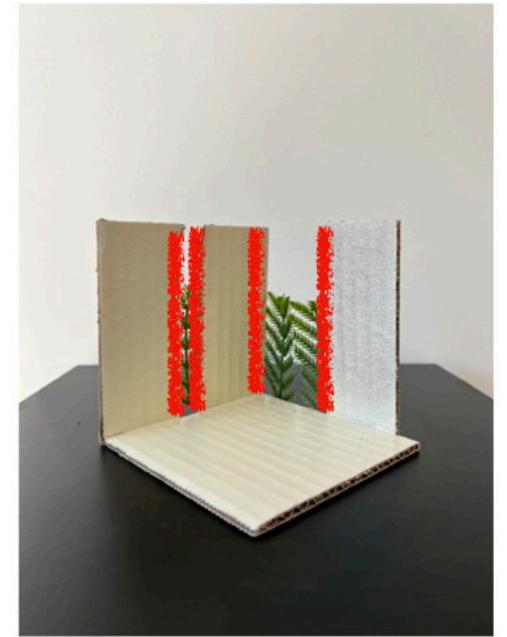
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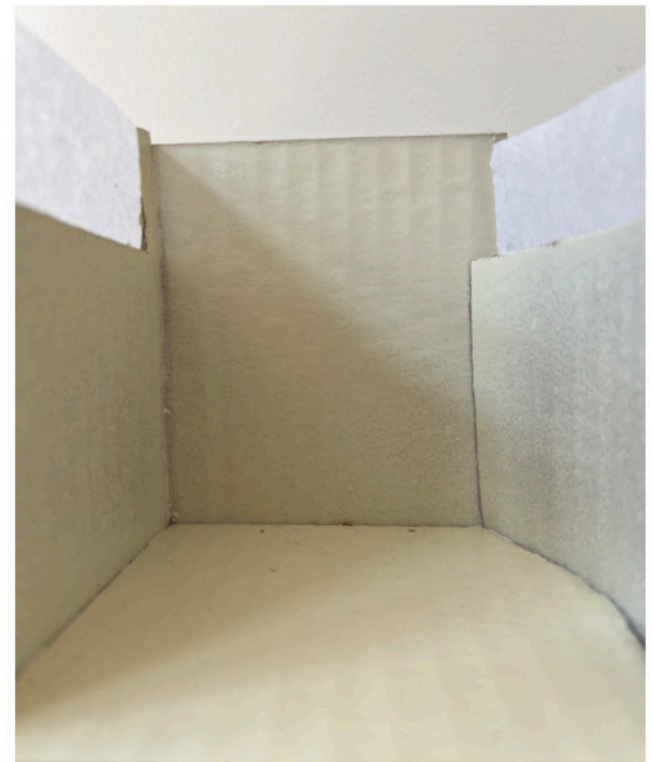
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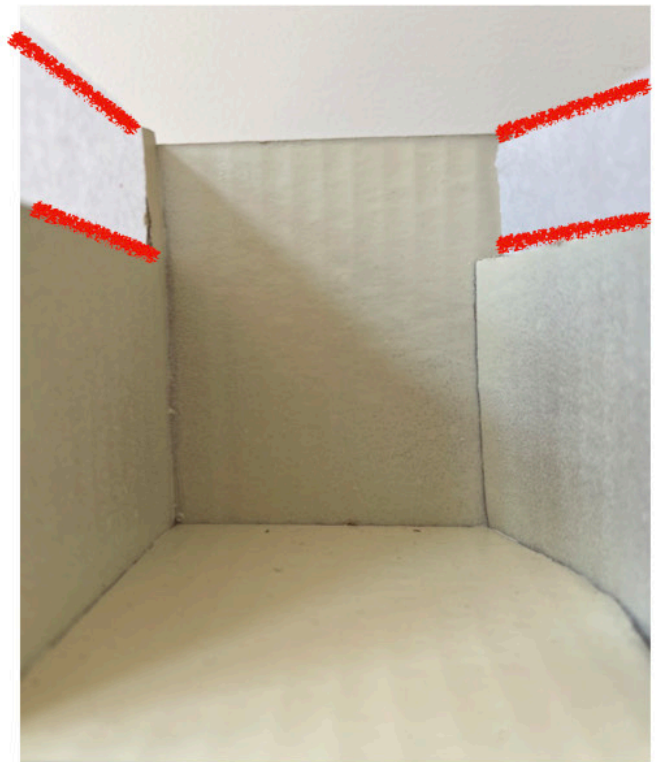


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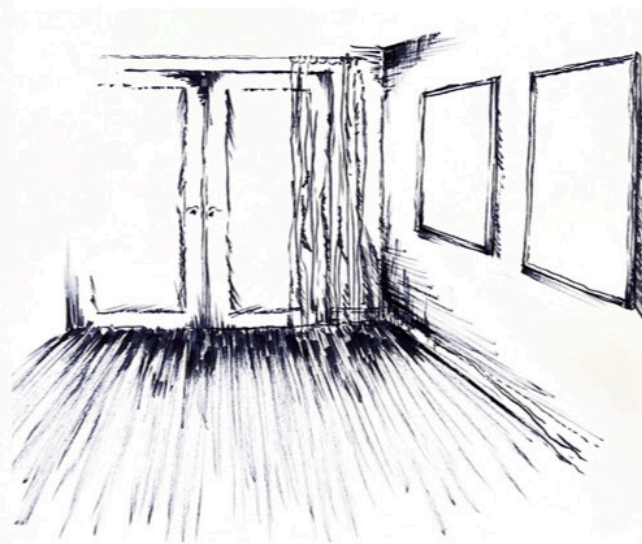
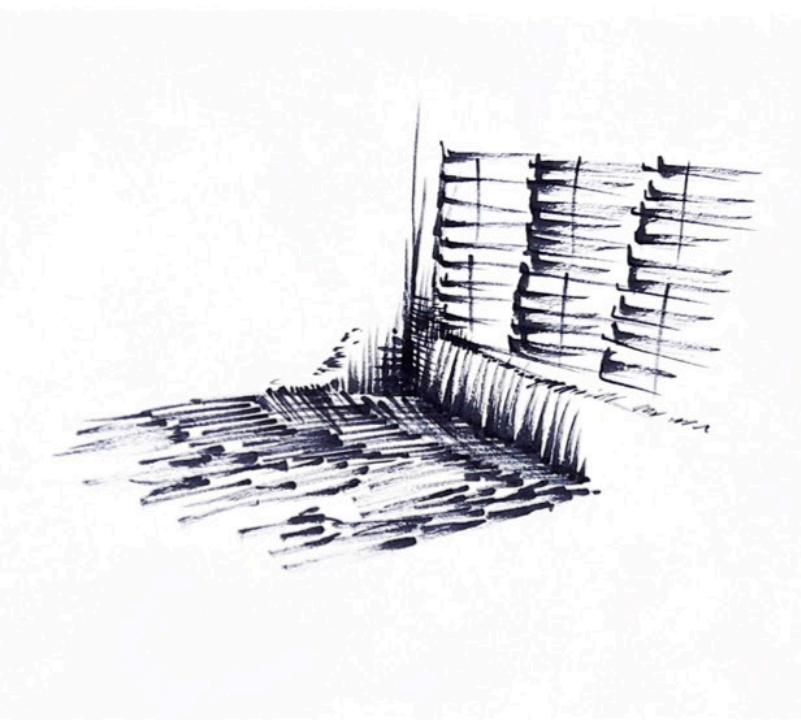
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PART III
THE
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MANIFESTO

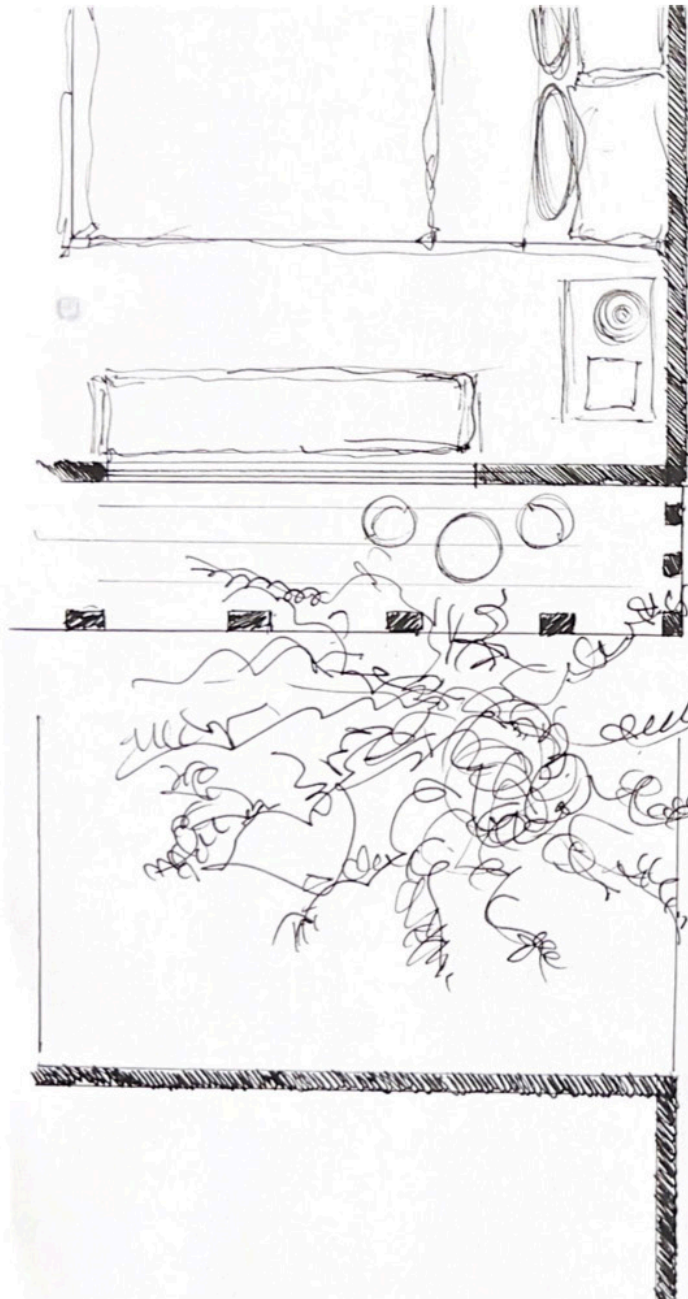
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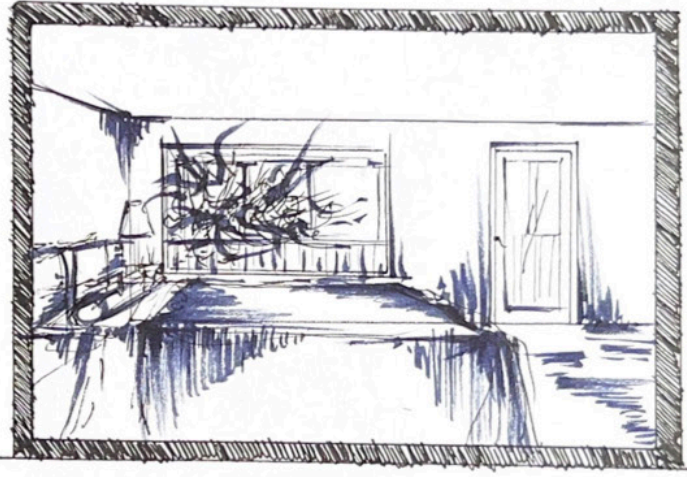


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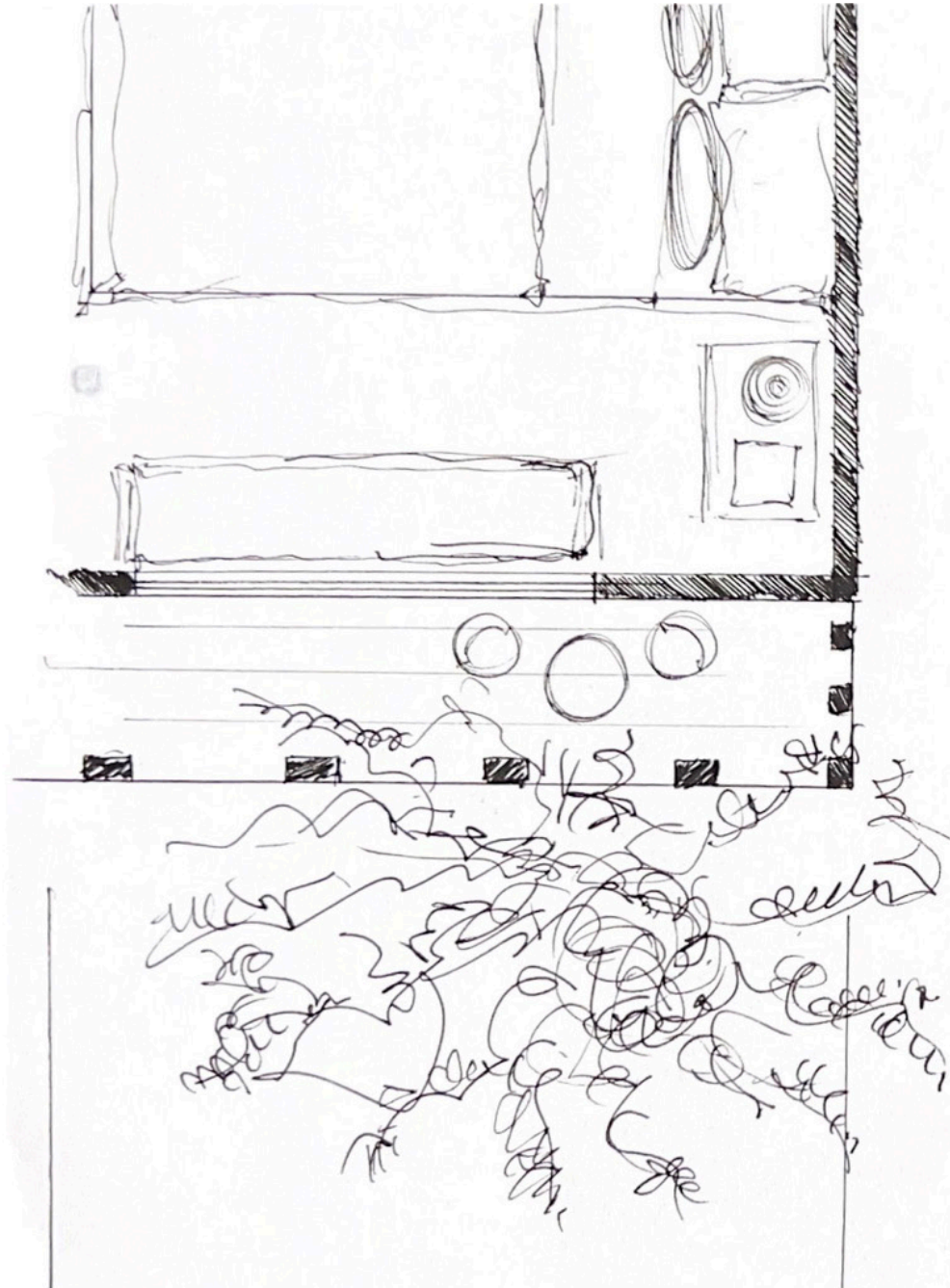


1226 COLLINS LANE
MOM'S BEDROOM
PERSPECTIVE, PLAN
+
SECTION



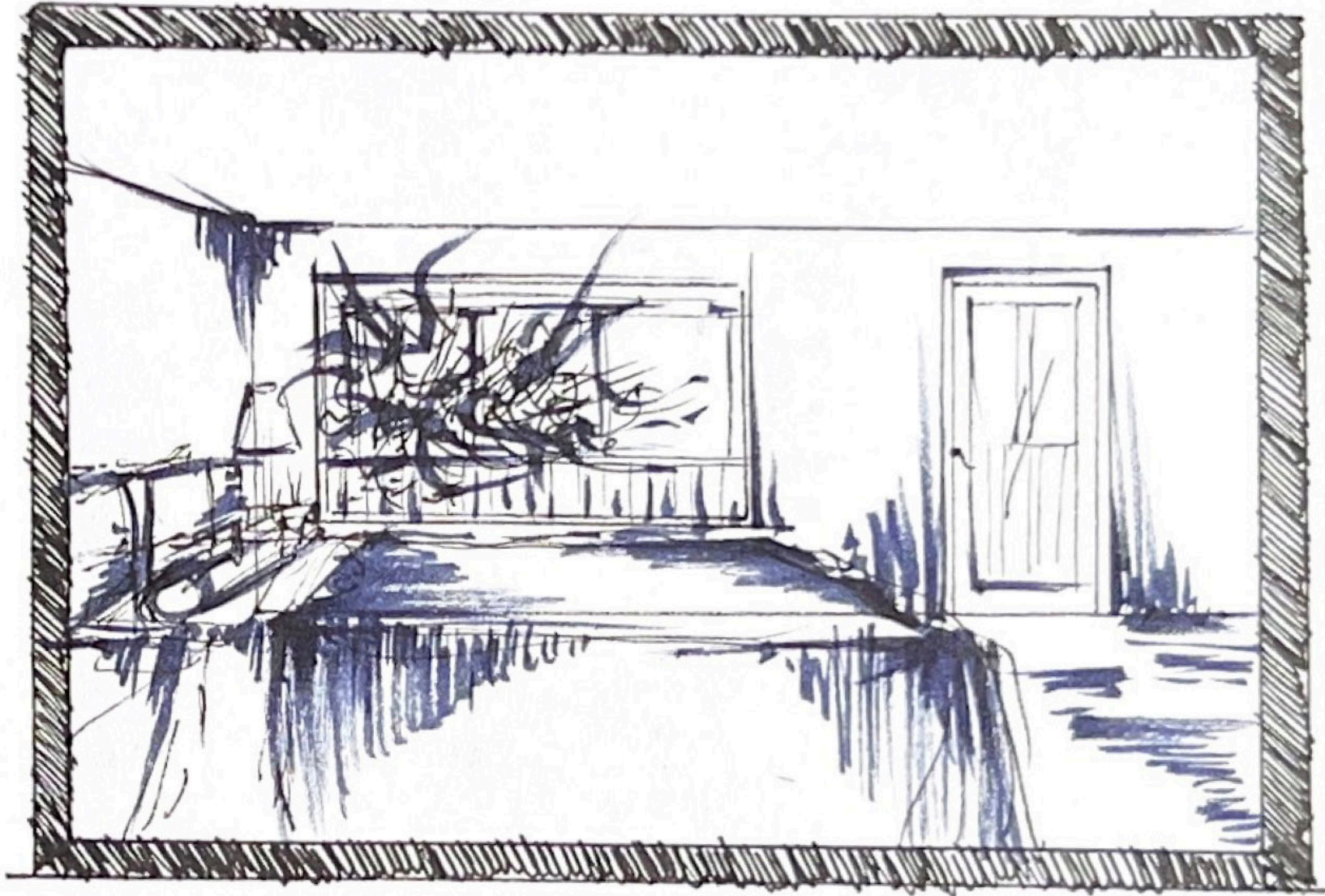
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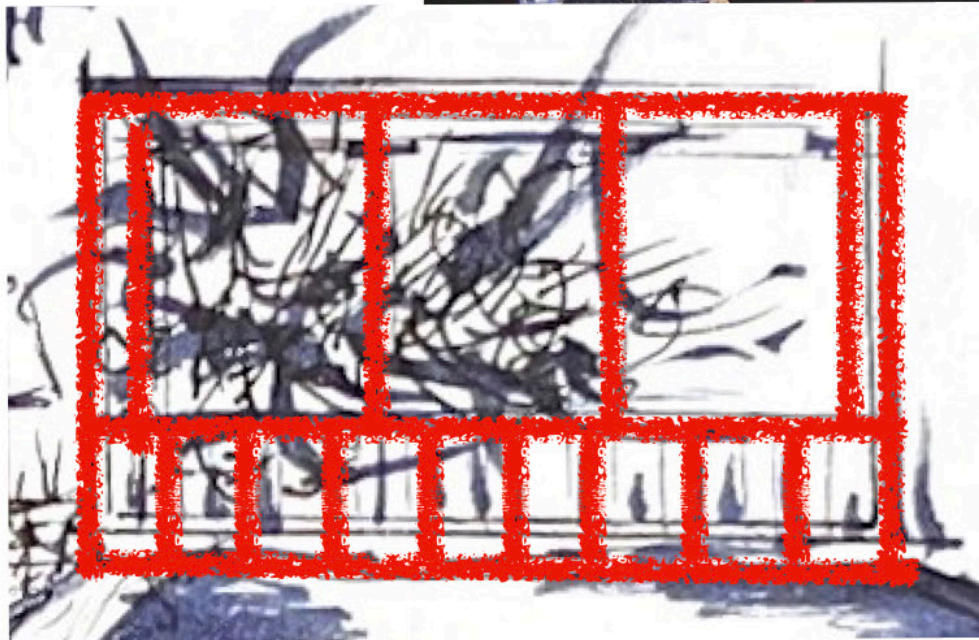
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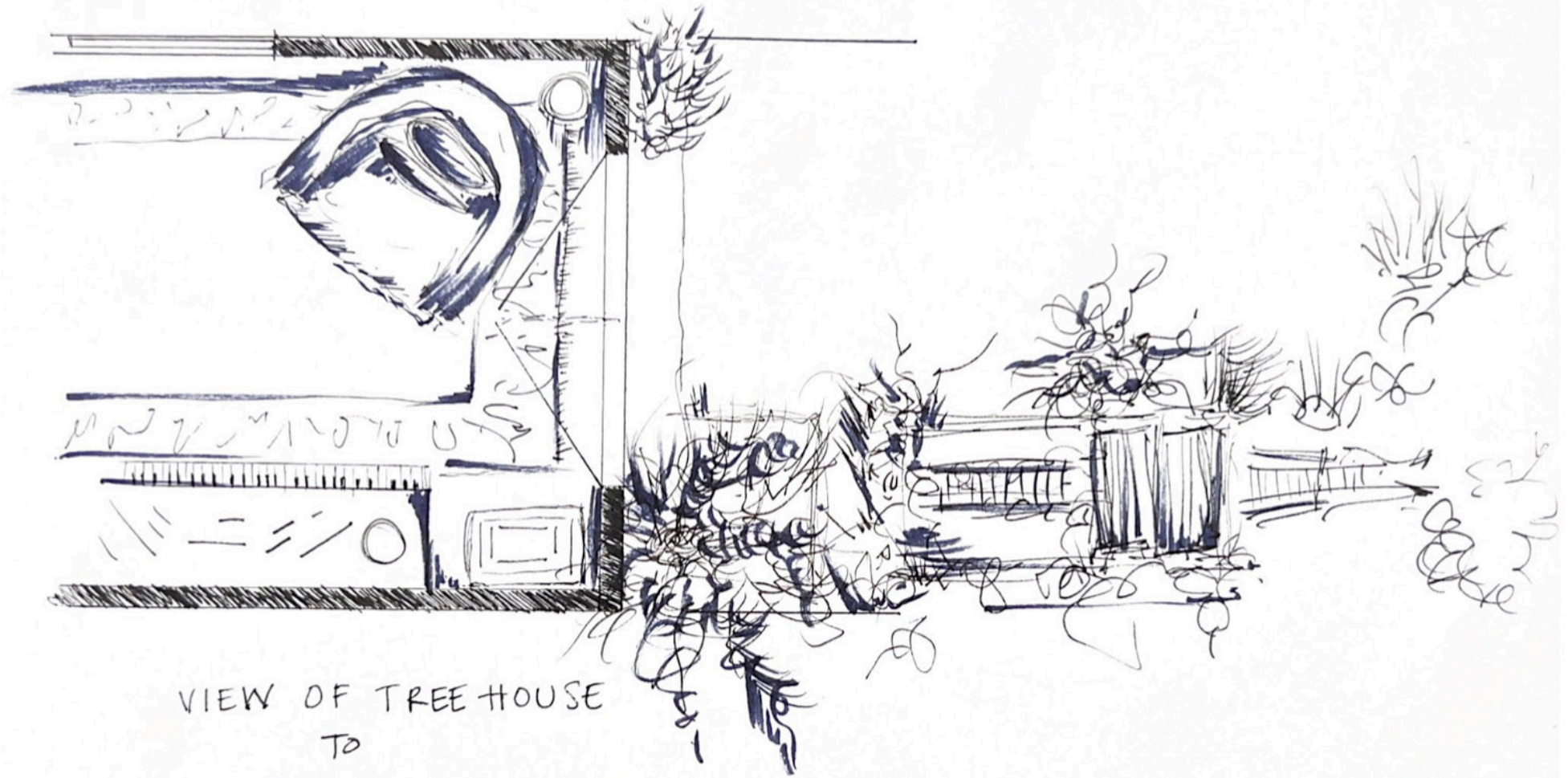
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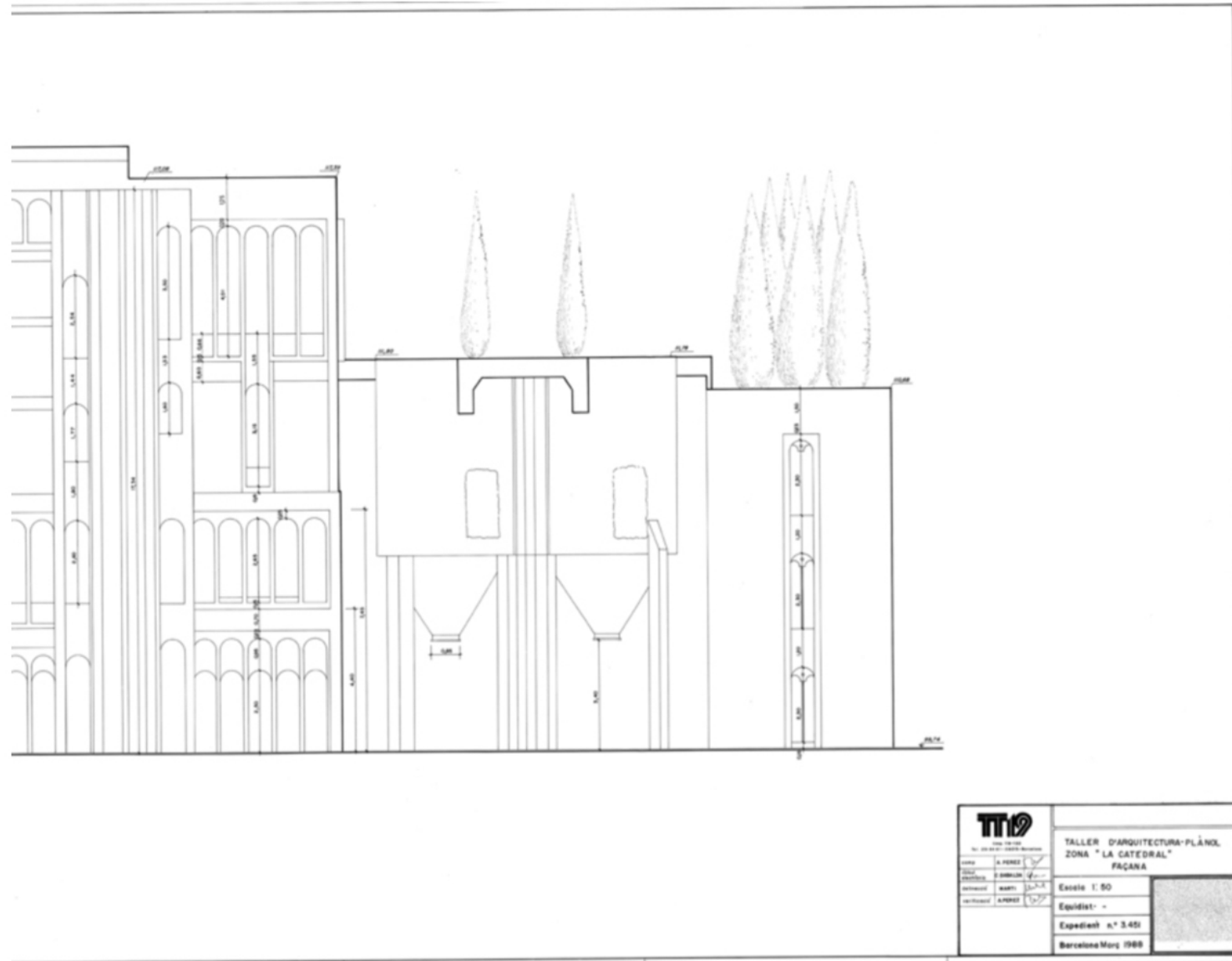


VIEW OF TREE HOUSE
TO
CEMENT FACTORY

PLAN +
ELEVATION

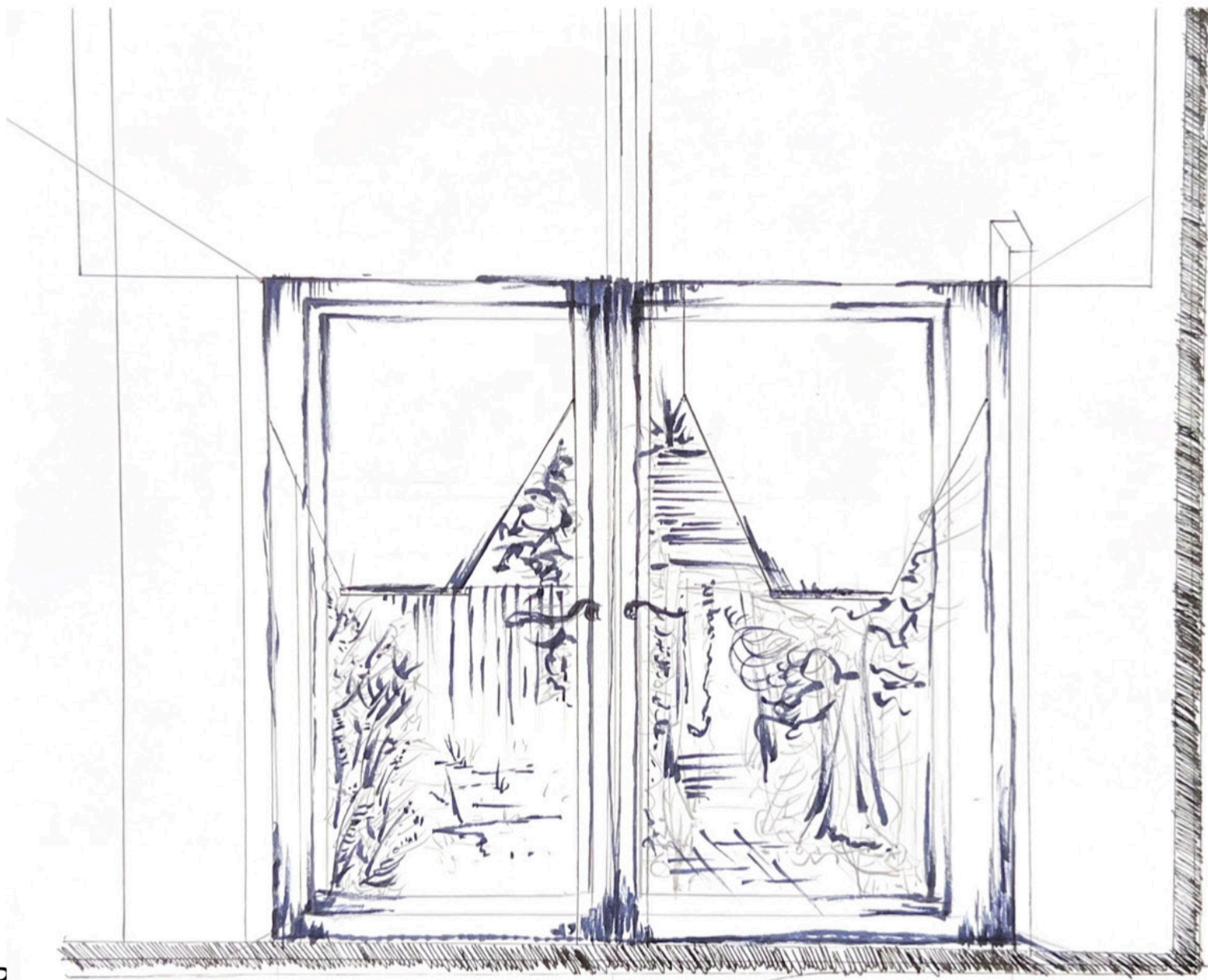
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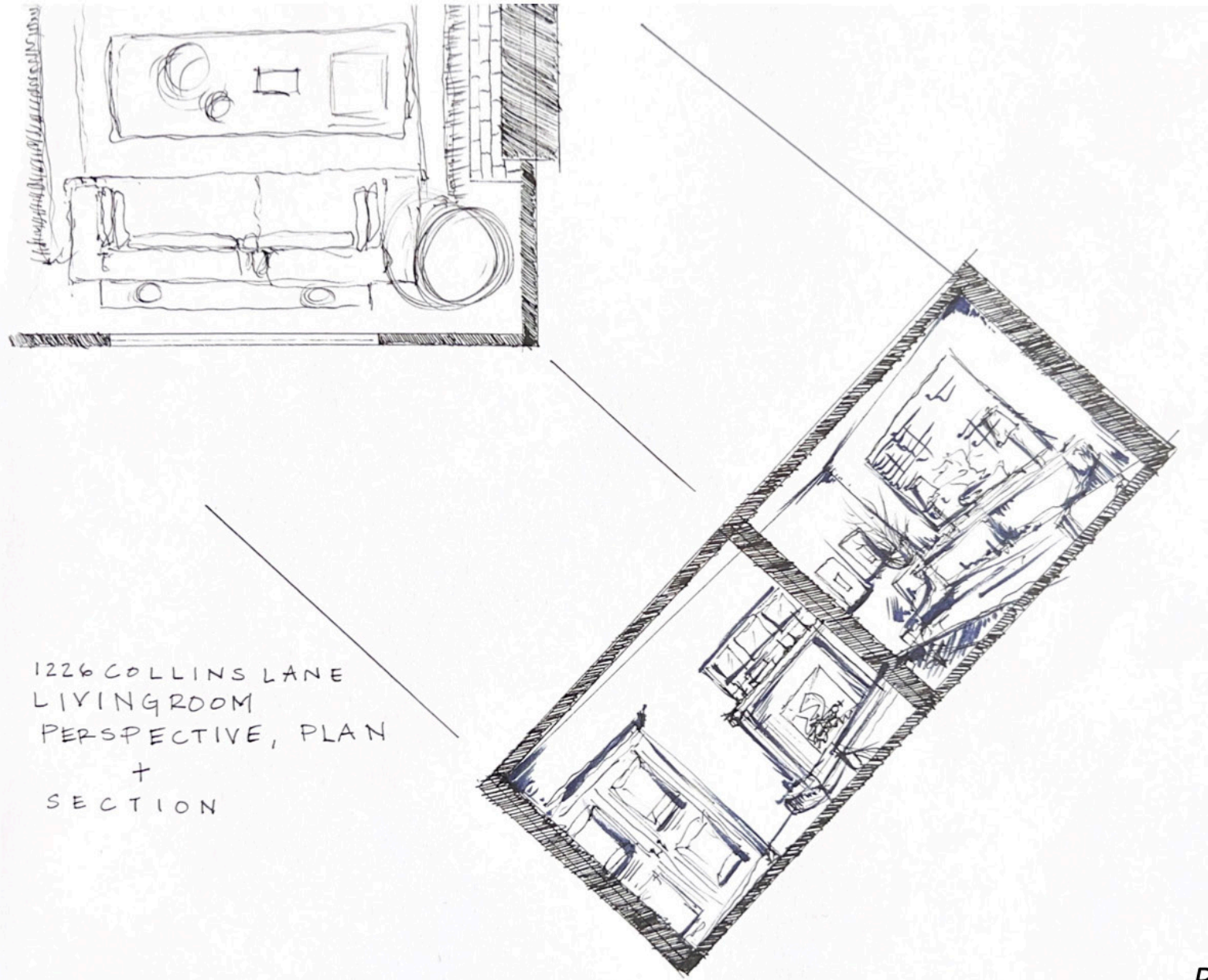
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JULIA MCARTHUR

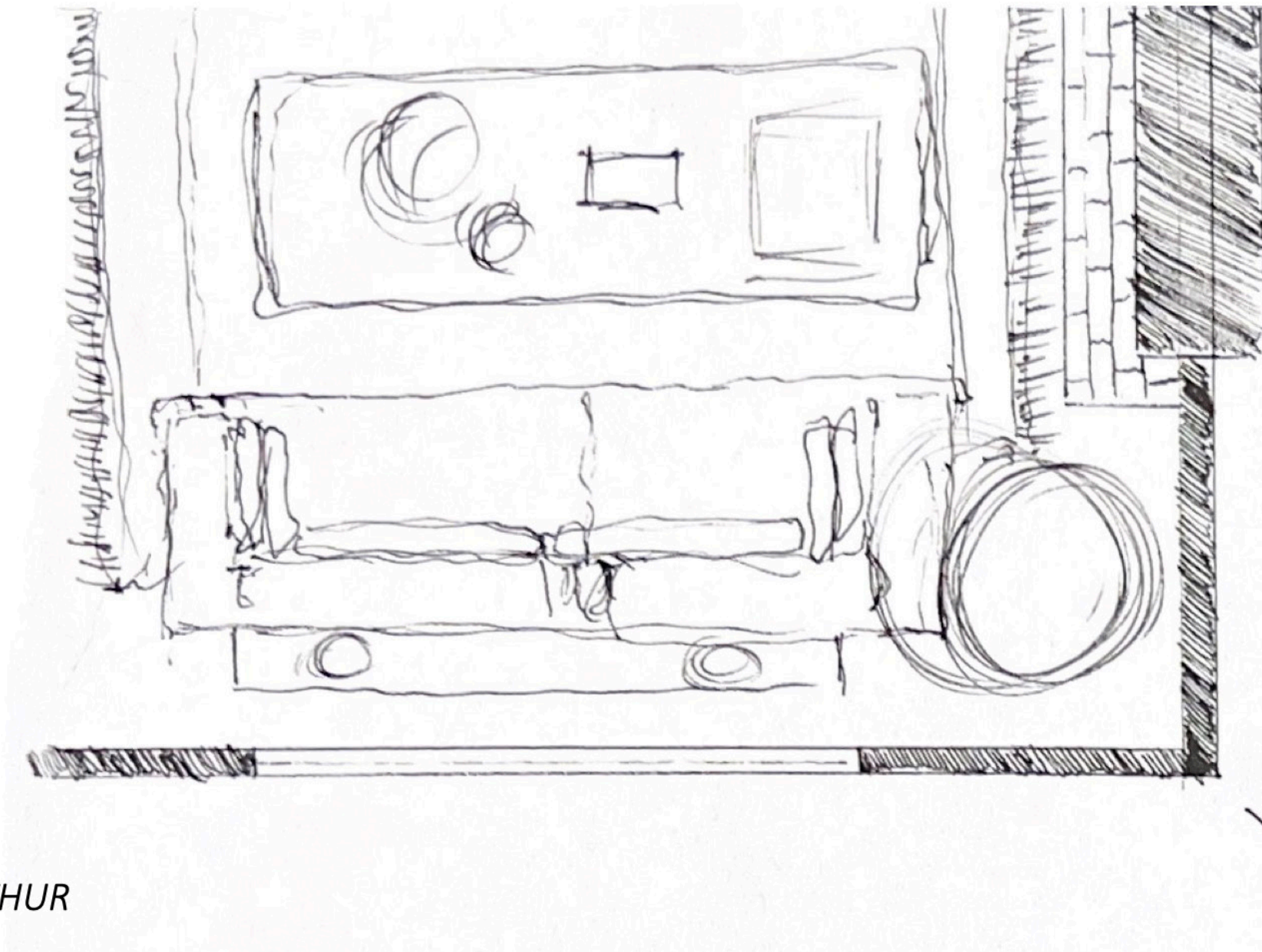
RISD THESIS 2023



1226 COLLINS LANE
LIVING ROOM
PERSPECTIVE, PLAN
+
SECTION

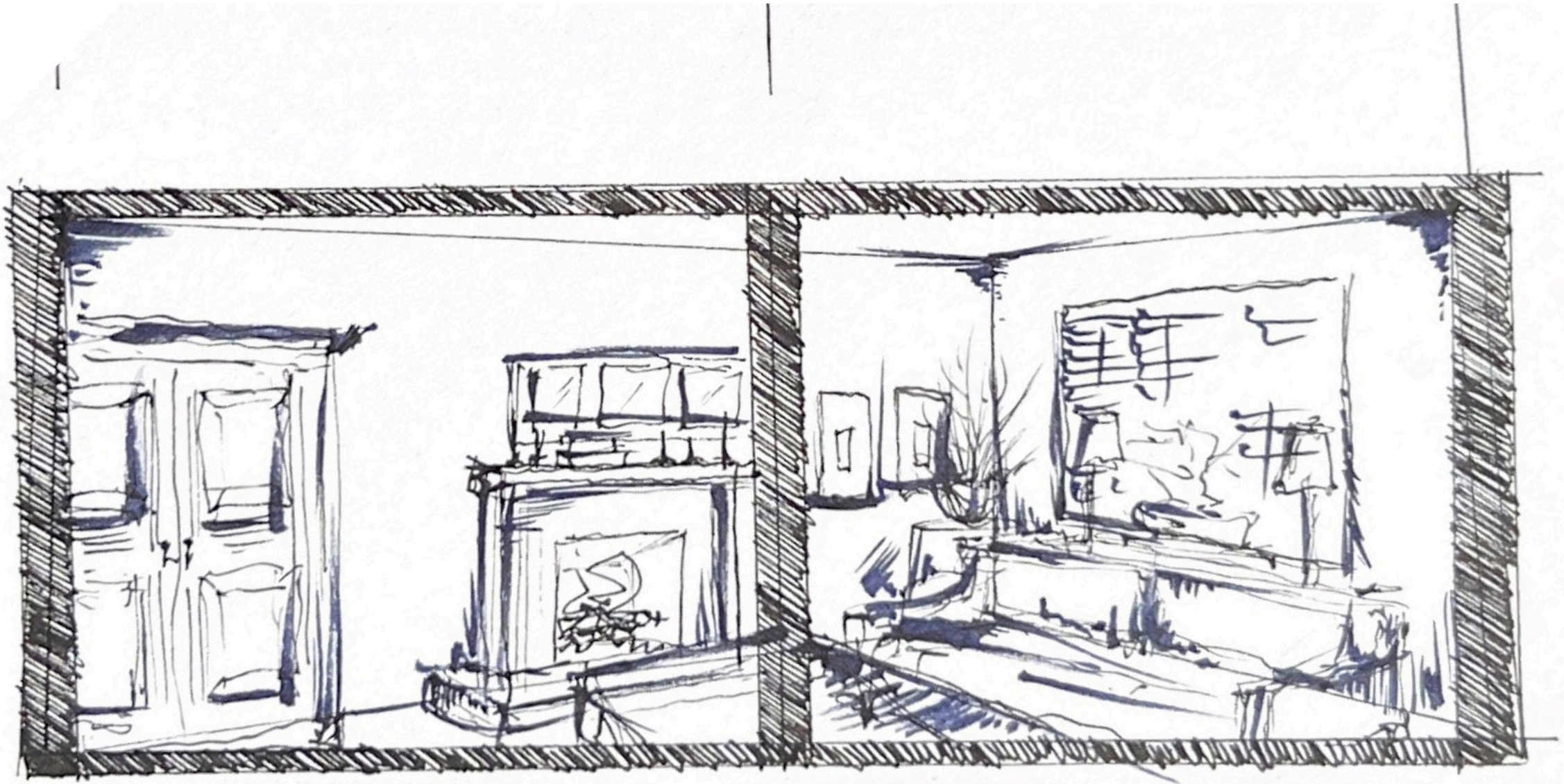
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RISD THESIS 2023



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RISD THESIS 2023



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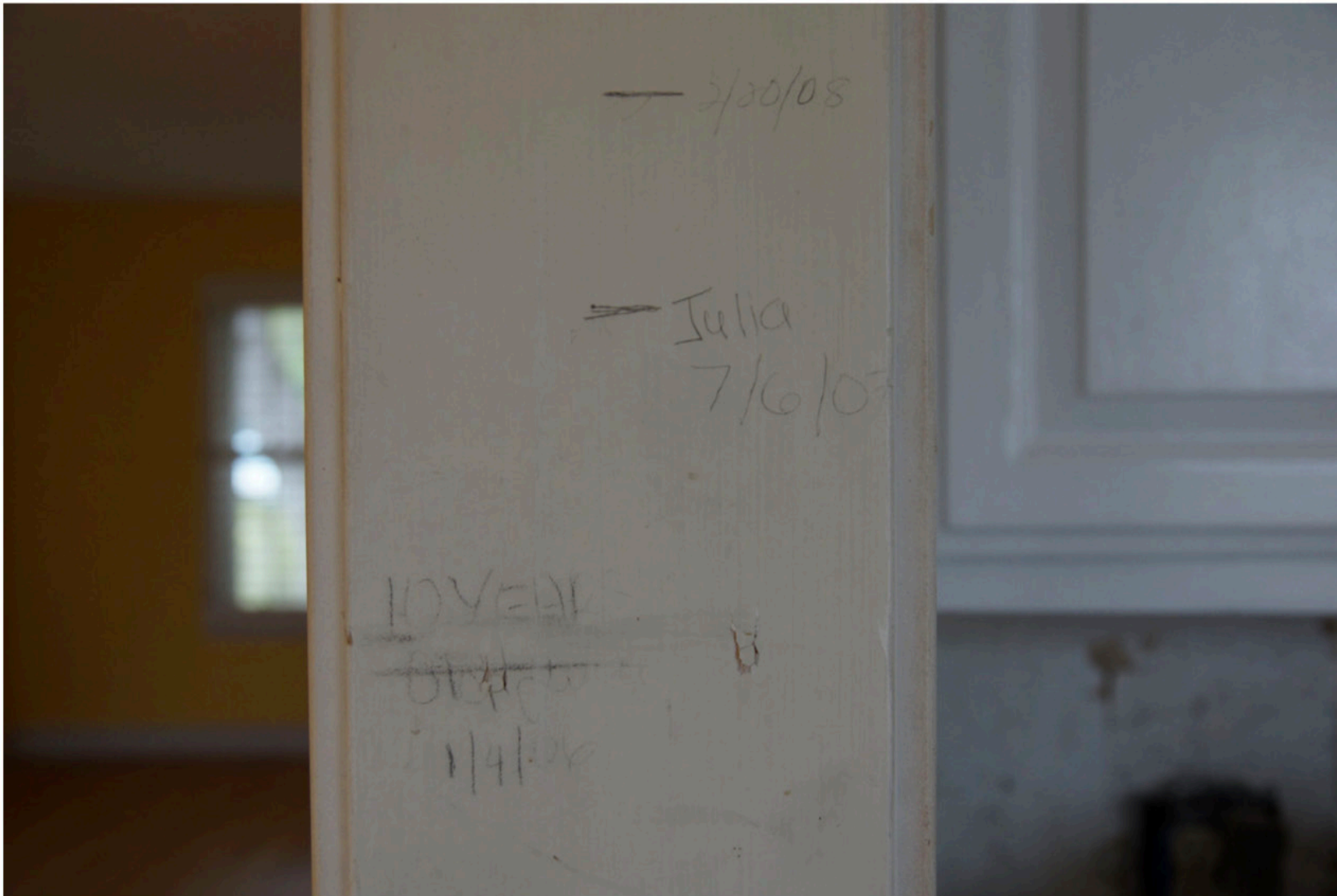
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